FATHER NURTURES BEST: NEOLIBERAL MELODRAMA OF BESET NURTURING FATHRHOOD IN THE LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE DIVISION OF UNIVERSITY OF HAWAIʻI AT MĀNOA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

IN

AMERICAN STUDIES

DECEMBER 2018

By

Yohei Sekiguchi

Dissertation Committee:

Kathleen Sands, Chairperson
Mari Yoshihara
Jonna Eagle
Brandy Nālani McDougall
Cynthia Franklin

Keywords: Nurturing Father, Neoliberalism, Melodrama, Entrepreneurship, Human Capital

Acknowledgements

This dissertation could have not been completed without the support of many people to whom I am indebted. I am very happy that I can acknowledge here some of those who helped this academic journey, and regret that I can name only a few of them.

I don't have adequate words to thank Kathleen Sands who made this project possible. She has been the most avid reader of my dissertation, and her constant and dedicated guidance has meant a lot to me. We have exchanged countless emails to discuss my project, and I always couldn't wait for opening her emails, which were full of insightful and critical comments as well as heartwarming encouragement. She was also very generous to turn her office into my second "home," where I can comfortably talk about anything. In short, I have learned a lot from her: academically and personally, she has deepened my understanding of what care is.

I am deeply grateful to Mari Yoshihara for navigating my transnational academic journey; without her mentoring and academic advice, my graduate life would not have been this happy. She has given me substantive feedbacks on many chapters from the early stage and generously offered the writing workshop, which gave me the basic idea of what dissertation was. Also, understanding the challenge of bridging the gap between Japanese and American academy, she has offered me a model of the transnational scholar and taught me the pleasure and challenge of exploring American Studies from the international perspective.

Obviously, I am greatly indebted to Jonna Eagle's strenuous research on American melodrama and masculinity. Her eye-opening feedbacks have been based on her exceptional knowledge about film studies and men's studies, and her patient guidance greatly helped me in terms of writing too. As a mentor, she suggested me how to juggle work and family.

Not to mention her profound knowledge on race which helped me add the dimension of whiteness to my study, Brandy Nālani McDougall has also literally demonstrated me how to juggle work and family, bringing her kid into her office. Hearing a baby cry while writing this dissertation made me happy, making sure that my study is meaningful to some.

Cynthia Franklin's thought-provoking suggestions helped me launch this project. Her suggestion to use Animal Studies was crucial for drawing an outline of Chapter Five. I was just so lucky to have these five outstanding academic advisors/mentors for my committee.

My colleagues have also helped me develop this project. Thank you to Yu-Jung Lee, Eriza Bareng, Yanli Luo, Stacy Nojima, Jeanette Hall, Yuka Polovina, and Sean Trundle, who participated in the writing workshop and offered great feedbacks. My special thanks to Kevin Lim, Keiko Fukunishi, and Sanae Nakatani who constantly cheered me up and held my hands through difficult moments. Your friendship has meant a lot to me. I am also thankful to Lori Mina and Rumi Yoshida for helping me with everything.

Last but not least, I'd like to appreciate my families. Writing this dissertation was a good opportunity for me to wonder how hard it was to take care of a son like me, so I cannot give enough thanks to my parents, Akiyoshi and Kazuko Sekiguchi. This dissertation is dedicated to my wife, daughter, and son: Shiho, Manami, and Kou Sekiguchi. They have been the true inspiration of this dissertation. I hope that someday they would read this dissertation and understand what fatherhood means to me.

Abstract

Offering the first sustained critical analysis of the cultural interaction between melodramas of the nurturing fatherhood and the emergent ideology of neoliberalism, my dissertation explores the representation of white middle-class fathers in late-twentieth-century American literature and movies. The nurturing father is a poster child of neoliberalism: he is represented as an entrepreneur who individually manages his time and skills; taking care of kids is represented not as a tiresome drudgery but as a part of a white middle-class father's self-investment which enhances his (children's) human capital.

The nurturing father's pain and suffering are instrumental in understanding the cultural interaction between neoliberalism and melodrama. Echoing the anxiety that special rights given to groups are violating white middle-class men's rights as individuals, the melodrama of the nurturing father implicitly contests the law's protection of mothers as a gendered group and its intervention into private issues. Furthermore, the nurturing father is almost always represented as white middle-class with African American and/or working-class deadbeat fathers serving as counterpoints. By critically examining the significance of the freedom and self-government the white middle-class nurturing father embodies, this dissertation discusses how the melodrama of the nurturing father evokes and eases anxiety about a fatherless society.

While traditionally the American family's morality was predicated on the mother's sentimental and religious power to secure home as the place of comfort, an oasis from the ravages of capitalism, morality and innocence in the age of neoliberalism are marked by the father's choice to nurture human capital and become an independent subject in the market economy. Untangling the intertwined relationship between home and the world, this dissertation analyzes the significance of nurturing fatherhood as a lifestyle choice and traces the contested negotiation between production and reproduction in the age of neoliberalism.

Table of Contents

Introduction

In 1981, feminist American literary critic Nina Baym published a seminal essay "Melodramas of Beset Manhood: How Theories of American Fiction Exclude Women Authors." Running against the current of the male-centric canon of American literature, Baym contended that American literature and literary criticism had established the masculine myth of American individualism while denigrating women as entrapping and domesticating men. Baym's feminist revision of the American literary canon rightly foregrounded the analytical framework of melodrama to criticize the binaries between men's individualistic adventure of self-discovery and women's suffocating domesticity: "the role of entrapper and impediment in melodrama of beset manhood is reserved for women."[1] Drawing on the critical framework of second-wave feminism, Baym contested stereotyped gender roles which naturalize women's domestic position. Baym's feminist criticism was certainly groundbreaking in 1981 when it was published; applying the critical category of melodrama to the canon of American literature which is predominantly written by male writers and centers on male protagonists, Baym suggested that melodrama played a crucial role in (the making of) the canon of American literature and subverted the cultural hierarchy between male and female writers.

Baym's provocative essay triggered immediate response from American literary critics and helped diversify the canon of American literature in the late twentieth century. Such a triumph of feminism in the field of American literature notwithstanding, late-twentieth-century American culture has also witnessed the emergence of what I call the "neoliberal melodrama of beset

[1] Nina Baym, "Melodramas of Beset Manhood: How Theories of American Fiction Exclude Women Writers." *American Quarterly* 33.2 (Summer 1981), 135.

nurturing fatherhood." Pivoting around the melodramatic pain and suffering of the white middle-class nurturing father, the "neoliberal melodrama of beset nurturing fatherhood" in American culture updates the significance of the "melodramas of beset manhood" in the late twentieth century. On the one hand, drawing on the melodramatic convention of the moral conflict between virtue and vice, the neoliberal melodrama of beset nurturing fatherhood reproduces the cultural representation of white middle-class men as beleaguered victims of the feminization of the American culture. On the other hand, by turning domesticity into the pathetic source of power, the updated male melodrama of the late twentieth century breaks away from the tradition Baym criticizes. White middle-class nurturing fathers in late-twentieth-century American literature and movies are not anxious about being entrapped and domesticated by women; on the contrary, these fathers' melodramatic suffering and resentment are predicated on the alleged gender bias of American society which naturalizes maternal rights to care for children while underestimating the role of nurturing fatherhood. Offering an historical analysis of the cultural representation of white middle-class nurturing fathers, this dissertation explores how the melodrama of the nurturing father attends to the complicated cultural negotiation about the transformed significance of American domesticity in the late twentieth century.

I use the term melodrama to examine a cultural modality rather than a small genre within novels or films. In spite of the protean nature of melodrama, most scholars since the 1980s agree that melodrama is the fundamental mode of American movies—or more broadly, American culture in general—rather than an excess of or digression from its mainstream convention. Delving into Peter Brooks' groundbreaking thesis that melodrama is the dominant mode of modern Western literature that seeks for moral legibility in the absence of sacred authority, film studies scholar Linda Williams argues in her seminal essay "Melodrama Revised" that

"melodrama is a peculiarly democratic and American form that seeks dramatic revelation of moral and emotional truths through a dialectic of pathos and action."[2] Drawing on this analytical framework, this dissertation explores how white middle-class nurturing father's morality is enacted through an updated version of this dialectic in the age of neoliberalism. What kind of "moral and emotional truths" does the nurturing father embody? How does neoliberalism contrast such "truths" with fallsehood, and what kind of anxiety can we see behind such a contrast? How does the melodrama of the nurturing father enact "a dialectic of pathos and action"? What does this father endure, and how does he fight back?

Answering these questions, this dissertation offers the first sustained critical analysis of the cultural interaction between the melodrama of the white middle-class nurturing father and the emergent ideology of neoliberalism in the late twentieth century. With the demise of the welfare state, the white middle-class nurturing father is represented as a hero who, thanks to his virtue of individualism, overcomes the crisis and limit of American families. Deconstructing the borderline between business and family, neoliberalism applies the model of the market to the realm of care; in most of the novels and films I analyze, taking care of kids is not a tiresome drudgery but a part of a father's self-investment which enhances his (and his children's) human capital. A collection of intangible assets an individual can acquire through his or her education, inheritance, and lifestyle choices, human capital is a "defining feature of neoliberalism."[3] As philosopher Michel

---

[2] Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1976); Linda Williams, "Melodrama Revisited," ed. Nick Browne, *Refiguring American Film Genres: History and Theory* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1998), 42. Williams' revision of melodrama also owes much to Christine Gledhill's essay: see Christine Gledhill, "The Melodramatic Field: An Investigation," ed. Christine Gledhill, *Home is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film* (London: British Film Institute, 1987), 5-39.

[3] Michel Feher, "Self-appreciation; or, the Aspiration of Human Capital." *Public Culture* 21.1 (2009), 24.

Feher argues, human capital nullifies the difference between production and reproduction: "[the] various things I do, in any existential domain (dietary, erotic, religious, etc.) all contribute to either appreciating or depreciating the human capital that is me, no less than my diligence as a worker or my ability to trade my professional skills."[4] Drawing on Feher's argument that not only production but reproduction is instrumental in enhancing human capital, this dissertation analyzes the significance of nurturing fatherhood as human capital and traces the contested negotiation between production and reproduction in the age of neoliberalism.

The nurturing father is a poster child of neoliberalism: to borrow from feminist philosopher Wendy Brown, the nurturing father demonstrates how "the rationally calculating individual bears full responsibility for the consequences of his or her action no matter how severe the constraints on this action."[5] The nurturing father's juggling of work and family works as a sign of the neoliberal virtue of flexibility. As many scholars argue, flexibility is the most important asset in the age of neoliberalism; being flexible means avoiding risk and making the right choice without being instructed by anybody.[6] Flexibility is highly evaluated in neoliberal culture; predicated on the model of the market which seeks to maximize the value of stock, the catch-all term flexibility "has been mush used in the development of, and justification for, capitalist practices."[7]

Rather than lionizing the neoliberal flexibility that the nurturing father enjoys, this dissertation critically examines his freedom as a new type of government: as sociologist Nikolas

---

[4] Ibid, 30.
[5] Wendy Brown, *Edgework* (New Jersey: Princeton UP, 2005), 42
[6] For the discussion about neoliberalism and flexibility, see David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, 1989); Richard Sennett, *The Corrosion of Character: The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998); Nancy Fraser, "From Discipline to Flexibilization? Rereading Foucault in the Shadow of Globalization." *Constellations,* 10.2 (2003), 160-171; Matthew Eagleton-Pierce, *Neoliberalism: The Key Concepts* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 77-81.
[7] Eagleton-Pierce, *Neoliberalism*, 77.

Rose puts it in his seminal essay about neoliberal government, "[although] strategies of welfare sought to govern *through society*, 'advanced' liberal strategies of rule ask whether it is possible to govern without governing *society*, that is to say, to govern through the regulated and accountable choices of autonomous agents."[8] The nurturing father is perfectly fit as a neoliberal "autonomous agent" because he individually governs himself (and his dependents) without relying on the state. Thus, through analysis of the cultural representation of the nurturing father, this dissertation aims to participate in the scholarly debate about the ideological significance of neoliberalism as a new type of self-government, which originates from Michel Foucault's observation about neoliberalism in his College De France lectures.[9]

Neoliberalism re-purposes melodrama to entrench the image of the Manichean conflict between beset individuals and the overprotective society. As political theorist Elisabeth Anker argues, "[melodramatic] condemnations of unfreedom manifest through the available terms of American individualism and become: if only this one obstacle is removed, then unobstructed agency can be restored."[10] The nurturing father epitomizes "unobstructed agency" which is freed from the state intervention into the private family sphere. Thus, the nurturing father's pain and suffering embody the cultural interaction between neoliberalism and melodrama: he suffers, to borrow from Michel Foucault, because he is an "entrepreneur of himself."[11] In most of the novels

---

[8] Nikolas Rose, "Governing 'Advanced' Liberal Democracies," ed. Andrew Barry, Thomas Osborne, and Nikolas Rose, *Foucault and Political Reason: Liberalism, Neoliberalism, and the Rationalities of Government* (Chicago: UP of Chicago, 1996), 61.

[9] Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (New York: Zone Books, 2015), 30. For seminal accounts of neoliberalism's normalization of individual government, see Nikolas Rose, "Governing 'Advanced' Liberal Democracies"; Michel Feher, "Self-appreciation; or, the Aspiration of Human Capital"; Nancy Fraser, "From Discipline to Flexibilization? Rereading Foucault in the Shadow of Globalization"; and Michael Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the College De France 1978-1979* (New York: Picador, 2004).

[10] Elisabeth R. Anker, *Orgies of Feeling: Melodrama and the Politics of Freedom* (Durham: Duke UP, 2014), 176.

[11] Michael Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 226.

and movies I analyze, the nurturing father is represented as a victim whose flexible lifestyle is punished by the society because of its novelty; he is always represented as a rebel who defies an authority that does not fully understand the significance of human capital. This is not to say, though, that the nurturing father is entrepreneurial only in his lifestyle; rather, the nurturing father is often literally represented as an entrepreneur who individually manages his time and human capital rather than being controlled by his company.

In addition to the obsolete economic system of Fordism and the welfare state, the cultural stereotype of mothers animates an identification with the nurturing father. In spite of its apparent embrace of feminism, the nurturing father as a cultural icon reinforces the gender hierarchy between men and women; in the most works I examine, feminist ideas are expropriated from women and appropriated for men. Neoliberalism's embrace of the nurturing father stands out all the more through its punitive attitude toward the single mother.[12] While neoliberalism constantly evokes the stigmatized image of the single mother dependent on welfare income, the peculiarly romanticized single father embodies the idealistic subject of neoliberalism: without relying on the state, the nurturing father remains economically competitive while performing the difficult act of juggling work and family. Reinforcing the ethos of American individualism, neoliberalism enacts the melodramatic moral conflict between the single father's right choices and the single mother's wrong choices. Choice is what fathers have: only fathers can enjoy the freedom of child-rearing, while mothers are rarely praised when they take care of kids. For mothers, childcare is deemed a duty rather than a choice, and their choice of participating in the labor force is considered

[12] For the neoliberalism's systematic stigmatization of single mothers, see Melinda Cooper, Melinda Cooper, *Family Values: Between Neoliberalism and the New Social Conservatism* (New York: Zone Books, 2017);

irresponsible and immoral. Thus, the adjective "nurturing" is used only for fathers; "nurturing mother" is tautological because childcare is a given for American mothers.

The nurturing father intermixes his resentment against the welfare state and women; the neoliberal melodrama of the nurturing father encapsulates the stereotypically neoliberal fear that the state is controlled by women. As many critics have argued, neoliberalism intricately manipulates the law to safeguard market society; nevertheless, the law is often represented as neoliberalism's antagonistic force which hampers its innovation and reforms it promises.[13] In the melodrama of the nurturing father, the Manichean conflict between virtue and vice is embodied by the custody battle between fathers and mothers. In most of the novels and movies I analyze, the nurturing father is constantly threatened and frustrated by the law which sides with the mother and misrecognizes his legal and moral innocence. Echoing the emerging anxiety that special rights given to groups are violating white middle-class men's rights as individuals, the melodrama of the nurturing father implicitly contests the law's protection of a gendered group and its intervention into private issues. The single mother gets economic and legal support from the state, while the state deprives the nurturing father of his legal rights to live with his children and makes him pay alimony.

In this sense, the melodrama of the nurturing father goes hand in hand with the father's rights movement.[14] Decrying feminism's emasculation of fathers, the father's rights movement emerged in late-twentieth-century America in tandem with institutionalization of no fault-divorce

---

[13] For neoliberalism's enforcement of economic competition through the law, see Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 115-173; David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (New York: Oxford UP, 2005), 64-86.

[14] For the father's rights movement, see Jocelyn Elise Crowley, *Defiant Dads: Fathers' Rights Activists in America* (New York: Cornell UP, 2008); Michael Kimmel, *Angry White Men: American Masculinity at the End of an Era* (New York: Nation Books, 2013), 135-168; Calinda N. Lee, "Father's Rights Movement," ed. Bret Carroll, *American Masculinities: A Historical Encyclopedia* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2003), 166-168.

laws. As the divorce rate soared in the 1970s, a faction of American—predominantly white—fathers started to protest against privileging women in divorce and child custody. Usually, the father's rights movement is more conservative about father's gender roles than is the melodrama of the nurturing father; it aims to restore father's "traditional" gender roles rather than allocating the nurturing role to the father. Nevertheless, the father's rights movement and the melodrama of the nurturing father share resentment against mothers and the feminized state. Unlike other rights-based movements, these two discourses are choice-based; representing fathers as victims of the state's invasion of their privacy, both discourses ask for less state intervention even if they ask for the father's legal rights.

As such, the melodrama of the nurturing father entrenches the image of innocence—the father's legal innocence is overlapped with the innocence of the children he loves—which is constantly threatened by women and the feminized state. In other words, the nurturing father embodies what Lauren Berlant calls "infantile citizenship."[15] According to Berlant, in late-twentieth-century America, the moral superiority of "traditional American values" against multiculturalism was consolidated through the image of the American innocent: "the adult without sin, the abducted and neglected child, and, above all, and most effectively, the fetus."[16] Contesting women's empowerment, the nurturing father is represented as a benevolent protector of these and other vulnerable subjects: underscoring his childlike naivete, the melodrama of the nurturing father encapsulates "the notion that the feeling self is the true self, the self that must be

[15] Lauren Berlant, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship* (Durham: Duke UP, 1997).
[16] Lauren Berlant, "The Subject of True Feeling," eds. Austin Sarat and Thomas R. Kearns, *Cultural Pluralism, Identity Politics, and the Law* (Ann Arbor: UP of Michigan, 1999), 55.

protected from pain or from history, that scene of unwelcome changing."[17] His melodramatic sympathy with and love for children is highlighted by the women's and state's purported lack of emotion: the nurturing father's feeling is visceral, while the mother is inattentive to the feelings of her children and thus represented as monstrous and unfit to hold infantile citizenship.

Furthermore, the cultural discourse of the nurturing father reinforces the boundary of not only gender but race and class. Drawing on Lisa Duggan and Nancy Fraser's discussion of identity politics as instrumental in underpinning neoliberalism, this dissertation will trace the genealogy of the cultural representation of the nurturing father as white and middle-class.[18] This is not to say that fathers who take care of children in the real world are predominantly white middle-class; as many critics have argued, a substantial number of American fathers have been engaged with child-rearing regardless of their race, class, and sexuality.[19] Nevertheless, in late-twentieth-century American literature and movies, the nurturing father is almost always represented as white middle-class with its counterpoint of the African American and/or working-class deadbeat father. As the Moynihan report and Charles Murray's essay "The Coming White Underclass" suggest, fatherlessness is always linked with the underclass black family, and the fantasy of the white middle-class nurturing fatherhood works as a counterpoint against fear of a fatherless society.[20] In order to analyze the significant gap between the reality and the

---

[17] Ibid, 56.

[18] Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003); Nancy Fraser, *Scales of Justice: Reimagining Political Space in a Globalizing World* (New York: Columbia UP, 2008).

[19] For the historical analysis of working-class men's gender roles and their engagement in child-rearing, see Judith Stacey, *Brave New Families: Stories of Domestic Upheaval in Late Twentieth Century America* (New York: Basic Books, 1990); Judith Stacey, *In the Name of the Family: Rethinking Family Values in the Postmodern Age* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 17-37;

[20] Charles Murray, "Coming White Underclass." *Wall Street Journal*, October 29, 1993. For the analysis of American anxiety about fatherlessness, see Judith Stacey, "Dada-ism in the 1990s: Getting Past Baby Talk about Fatherlessness." Ed. Cynthia R. Daniels, *Lost Fathers: The Politics of Fatherlessness in America* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 51-83. See also June Carbone

representation of the nurturing father, this dissertation examines how the nurturing father's gender roles are constructed by race and class; the nurturing father's gender roles look liberating from the perspective of the white middle-class man, but their intersection with race and class is crucial in exploring the significance of the freedom and self-reliance he embodies. The white middle-class nurturing father's new lifestyle enjoys broad support in the late twentieth century because he evokes and contains national anxiety about the family gone awry when fathers are liberated from the yoke of traditional gender roles.

Melodrama and Fatherhood

American films about the nurturing father have been rarely analyzed within the framework of melodrama. Before the 1980s, film studies' interest in melodrama pivoted around a specific genre of films that is usually called the "family melodrama." With Thomas Elsaesser's highly influential essay "Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama," the filmic genre of family melodrama was established by film scholars in the 1970s.[21] Focusing on its excessive and subversive use of mise en scène—unique image made by everything (lighting, costume, setting, etc.) that is put before the camera—these scholars highly evaluated the 1950s' family melodramas of Douglas Sirk, Vincent Minnelli, and Nicholas Ray.[22] Thematically, these scholars mostly focused on the cinematic representation of the post-war American family and

and Naomi Cahn, *Marriage Markets: How Inequality Is Remaking the American Family* (New York: Oxford UP, 2014), 22-32.

[21] Thomas Elsaesser, "Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama," ed. Christine Gledhill, *Home is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film* (London: British Film Institute, 1987), 43-69.

[22] John Mercer and Martin Shingler, *Melodrama: Genre, Style, Sensibility* (New York: Columbia UP, 2004), 12-27. See also Gledhill, "The Melodramatic Field: An Investigation," 5-11 and Williams, "Melodrama Revisited," 42-51.

associated the family melodrama's ironical use of mise-en-scène with women's oppression and liberation.

Sometimes these critics just ignored fathers in their exclusive focus on the theme of femininity; at other times, they sensationally displayed fathers' deviation from normative gender roles ("either pathetically castrated, or monstrously castrating") to ironically elucidate the problems and pressures the apparently picture-perfect American family of the 1950s have.[23] As Jonna Eagle explains, "[in] the male weepies of the 1950s, protagonists are caught between a rejection of strong patriarchal authority and a phobic relationship to masculine softness."[24] For example, in *Rebel Without a Cause* (Nicholas Ray, 1955), the protagonist Jim Stark's father Frank is represented as a weak father who is subjugated by his wife. This is most symbolically represented through the mise en scène: Frank grovels on the ground wearing a flowery apron.[25] In the decade of conformity, the representation of Frank in an apron evoked the anxiety of the audience precisely because wearing a feminine apron deviates from the norm of breadwinning fatherhood under the ideology of the nuclear family. In contrast, the cinematic power of *Kramer vs. Kramer*, for example, lies in its normalization of a nurturing father's menial and painstaking domestic jobs, as I will discuss in Chapter Three. If "it is the father who tends to remain throughout [the family melodrama of the 1950s] the most unsympathetic figure, even more so when absent or deceased," the melodrama of the nurturing father revises this cinematic tradition

---

[23] David N. Rodowick, "The Domestic Melodrama of the 1950s," Gledhill, *Home Is Where the Heart Is*, 278.

[24] Jonna Eagle, *Imperial Affects: Sensational Melodrama and the Attractions of American Cinema* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP), 131. See also Tom Lutz, "Men's Tears and the Roles of Melodrama," ed. Milette Shamir and Jennifer Travis, *Boys Don't Cry?: Rethinking Narratives of Masculinity and Emotion in the U.S.* (New York: Columbia UP, 2002), 185-203 for the father-son conflict in the family melodrama of the 1950s.

[25] Stella Bruzzi, *Bringing up Daddy: Fatherhood and Masculinity in Post-war Hollywood* (London: British Film Institute, 2005), 53.

and represents the nurturing father as a tear-jerking victim with whom the audience is invited to be sympathetic.[26]

In opposition to the critical focus on the family melodrama of the 1950s, film scholars since the 1990s "began to move away from an emphasis on pathos, domesticity, and the feminine and toward a greater emphasis on action and sensation."[27] Inspired by Steve Neale's pioneering study of the film industry's popular use of the term melodrama for thrilling action movies in the early twentieth century, Williams defined action as well as pathos as the central element of melodrama, deconstructing the distinction between women's family melodrama and men's action movies.[28] Thanks to film studies' new definition of melodrama, it is not unusual now that film scholars analyze action or Western movies—conventionally believed to be masculine and thus antithetical to melodrama—within the analytical framework of melodrama.[29] Nevertheless, as Amy J. Woodworth states in her PhD dissertation, "what still needs to be amended . . . is the bifurcation of melodrama that makes 'weepy' melodrama into the province of women and spectacular action films and other (purportedly) 'non-weepy' melodrama into the province of men."[30] With the exception of the family melodrama of the 1950s, fatherhood in American

[26] Mercer and Shingler, *Melodrama*, 13.
[27] Eagle, *Imperial Affects*, 5.
[28] Steve Neale, "Melo Talk: On the Meaning and Use of the Term 'Melodrama' in the American Trade Press," *Velvet Light Trap* 32 (1993), 66-89; Williams, "Melodrama Revised."
[29] See Tania Modleski, "Clint Eastwood and Male Weepies," *American Literary History* 22.1 (2010), 136-158; Eagle, *Imperial Affects*.
[30] Amy J. Woodworth, "From Buddy Film to Bromance: Masculinity and Male Melodrama Since 1969" (PhD dissertation, Temple University, 2014), 6.

movies is rarely examined within the analytical framework of melodrama.[31] This dissertation aims to address this critical lacuna.[32]

Neoliberalism and Fatherhood

Contrary to the conventional understanding that family issues belong to neoconservative rather than neoliberal politics and culture, family plays an instrumental role in underpinning the ideology of neoliberalism. As political scientist Melinda Cooper discusses, family values are often understood as peripheral to neoliberalism, just a rhetoric to cover for the expansion of income inequality and "seduce the working class into alliances that would ultimately work against them"; nevertheless, such a typical understanding cannot untangle the complicated interaction between neoliberalism and neoconservatism and reinforces the binary of the public (neoliberalism associated with a modern market economy embraced by elite people) and the private (neoconservatism associated with anti-modern family values embraced by ignorant working class people).[33] As Cooper discusses, in spite of the huge difference between neoconservative and neoliberal views of the family, they have constantly come to a consensus on family issues because family is central to both.

According to Brown, the neoliberal market economy is supported by femina domestica, providing care in and out of the household and working as "the invisible infrastructure sustaining a world of putatively self-investing human capitals."[34] While neoliberalism provides a limited number of women with an opportunity to become "entrepreneurs of themselves," it reinforces the

[31] Woodworth's dissertation is exceptional in its analysis of fatherhood melodrama since 1969, but her analysis lacks the aspect of its historical interaction with neoliberalism.
[32] For the sustained analysis of American fatherhood in Hollywood movies, see Bruzzi, *Bringing up Daddy.*
[33] Cooper, *Family Values*, 22.
[34] Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 106.

naturalization of motherhood. Therefore, as Brown and Cooper discuss, neoliberalism frequently stigmatizes single mothers in its alignment with neoconservatism: they are the antithesis of femina domestica. Single mothers' dependence on welfare is nightmarish for neoliberalism because single mothers undermine capital without investing in themselves.

Brown and Cooper's analysis of neoliberalism's influence on family is very important; yet, their discussion is centered on (single) mothers and misses the significance of (single) fathers in neoliberal culture. If neoliberalism blurs the borderline between production and reproduction as Feher argues, family is not solely "the invisible infrastructure sustaining a world of putatively self-investing human capitals" but itself a part of the self-investing human capital. In other words, family is not immune to the external force of market society; femina domestica is certainly a significant player in neoliberalism, but Brown's argument about femina domestica should be supplemented with its counterpoint of the nurturing father, who nurtures children in the name of a self-investing human capital. Thus, the ideal family normalized by neoliberalism is not only conservative but innovative, and the negotiation between these newer and older forms of family is crucial in understanding the ambiguous relationship between neoliberalism and family.

This is not to say, though, that the nurturing father and femina domestica provide the same kind of domestic work. The nurturing father in American culture nurtures children as a part of his self-investment, while for femina domestica taking care of children is painstaking domestic labor. The difference between the nurturing father and femina domestica shows the stratification of labor in the age of neoliberalism. As Zygmunt Bauman discusses, jobs are divided into two categories in the post-industrial world:

> Like everything else which may reasonably hope to become the target of desire and an object of free consumer choice, jobs must be 'interesting'—varied, exciting, allowing for

> adventure, containing certain (though not excessive) measures of risk, and giving occasion to ever-new sensations. Jobs that are monotonous, repetitive, routine, unadventurous, allowing no initiative and promising no challenge to wits . . . are 'boring.'[35]

The nurturing father and femina domestica are two sides of the same coin: the former chooses childcare and turns it into "interesting" work, while the latter takes charge of monotonous childrearing—in which the nurturing father does not have any interest—as a "boring" obligation and domestic labor, not a choice. Thus, the nurturing father does not simply take the place of the femina domestica; rather, underlining the aspect of choice and self-investment, the nurturing father transforms the very concept of the family and domesticity.

The nurturing father is similar to the American housewife of the nineteenth century in his admiration of domesticity, but his primary goal is to cultivate the subject of choice, not discipline. As Amy Kaplan argues, in the context of the nineteenth-century American home, "[domestication] implies that the home contains within itself those wild or foreign elements that must be tamed; domesticity monitors the borders between the civilized and the savage as it regulates the traces of savagery within its purview."[36] If the nineteenth-century women's mission was to reproduce uniform, homogeneous Americans, the nurturing father places higher value on choice and heterogeneity; being different is more valuable in a consumer society. Normalizing entrepreneurial choice rather than discipline, the nurturing father appropriates domesticity to reproduce his human capital.

<u>Chapter Outline</u>

---

[35] Zygmunt Bauman, *Work, Consumerism and the New Poor* (Berkshire: Open UP, 2005), 33-36.
[36] Amy Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2002), 25-26.

Each chapter that follows has a specific focus, topic, and objective in illustrating the cultural interaction between neoliberalism, melodrama, and nurturing fatherhood from the 1970s to the 1990s. Exploring a single novel, movie, or story, each chapter provides specific arguments about the chosen topic while displaying the commonalities between them. "Father Nurtures Best" is organized around five chapters. Chapter One, "Reproducing the Hard-Boiled Consumer: Human Capital and Makeover Culture in *Early Autumn*" examines Robert B. Parker's hard-boiled novel *Early Autumn* (1981), which demonstrates the unique tension between hard-boiled masculinity, nurturing fatherhood, and consumerism. Originating from the cultural context of New Deal liberalism, hard-boiled fiction often dramatizes the conflict between family-oriented sympathy and market-driven individualism; serving as an introduction to later chapters, this chapter highlights the difference between New Deal liberalism and neoliberalism, Fordism and post-Fordism and the nuclear family and the post-nuclear family. In the age of neoliberalism, *Early Autumn* attests to the market economy's reconstruction of family values; rescuing a neglected boy and inculcating in him the ethos of entrepreneurship, the hard-boiled detective teaches his surrogate son how to augment the value of human capital through masculinized consumerism. Exploring the tension between the private eye's hard body and melodramatic emotion, this chapter also examines how the private eye's morality is displayed by his hard body and "through a dialectic of pathos and action." Furthermore, tracing the genealogy of neoliberal governmentality as white, male, and middle-class, this chapter discusses how the private eye embodies the self-monitoring gaze of a makeover culture, which is normalized by neoliberalism.

Chapter Two, "Rebellious Caretakers: *The Cider House Rules* and Women's Reproductive Rights" focuses on John Irving's *The Cider House Rules* (1985). Shifting its focus from the masculine tradition of hard-boiled fiction, this chapter explores white middle-class fathers' often overlooked roles in the neoliberal politics of abortion and charts their appropriation of second-

wave feminism. Embracing the neoliberal rhetoric that the government should guarantee women's choice to abort only when women do not rely on public funding in paying the cost of abortion, *Cider House* reinforces white middle-class fathers' private law in choosing the family and controlling women's bodies. In spite of the novel's focus on abortion under the Comstock Law, the novel's attention shifts from women's pain and suffering to the repressed love between fathers and sons; *Cider House* solicits the reader's melodramatic identification with white middle-class nurturing fathers, not mothers. This chapter also illustrates how white middle-class nurturing fathers' sympathy is counterposed with working-class and African American fathers' monstrous domestic violence; the most painful and sensational abortion in *Cider House* is caused by such undomesticated fathers, and white middle-class fathers heroically rescue and protect helpless women from the threat of irresponsible fathers.

In order to examine neoliberalism's appropriation of male melodrama, Chapter Three and Four mostly scrutinize two popular but very different films about nurturing fatherhood. Chapter Three, "*Kramer vs. Kramer*: Paternal Innocence in the Age of Neoliberalism" explores the making of paternal innocence in *Kramer vs. Kramer* (Benton 1979), which is one of the most iconic movies about nurturing fatherhood in the United States. In *Kramer vs. Kramer*, the nurturing father's quotidian daily life looks innocent and moral because it is threatened by the gendered entitlement given to the single mother. Illuminating the contrast between the beautiful but silent tableau of a father and a son and the deceptive language used in the courtroom, this chapter discusses the film's melodramatic use of muteness as a sign of paternal virtue and innocence. This chapter also elucidates neoliberalism's reversal of the relationship between capital and labor; *Kramer vs. Kramer* solves the tension between work and family by underlining Ted's human capital and nullifying the distinction between production and reproduction.

Chapter Four, "*Mrs. Doubtfire*: Melodramatic Suffering and the Reassertion of Power through Laughter" analyzes the interaction between comical laughter and melodramatic pathos in *Mrs. Doubtfire* (Columbus 1993). Produced almost fifteen years after the release of *Kramer vs. Kramer* and resonating with the emergent discourse of the fatherless society in the 1990s, *Mrs. Doubtfire* attests to white middle-class fathers' deepening resentment and fear of sexual, racial and underclass others. On the one hand, the film invites the audience's pathetic identification with the white middle-class father who loses his family and job and has to conceal his masculine and fatherly identity to meet his children. On the other hand, *Mrs. Doubtfire* restores a white middle-class father's authority by reinforcing and making fun of the stereotype of sexual, racial, and underclass others. The white middle-class father's male heterosexual drag as a Victorian housekeeper not only caricatures and ridicules women but reinforces the gender stereotype that women's primary role is housekeeping. Moreover, by transporting the persona of a Victorian housekeeper into the TV business, *Mrs. Doubtfire* embraces a white middle-class nurturing father's entrepreneurial self-making; disguising himself as a woman, the white middle-class father in *Mrs. Doubtfire* addresses his fear of being looked at and inspected, but overcomes such fear by turning a female body into a commodity which enhances his human capital.

Chapter Five, "Neoliberal Governmentality and the Revision of Melodrama in Raymond Carver's 'Jerry and Molly and Sam'" discusses Raymond Carver's criticism and revision of melodrama in his short story "Jerry and Molly and Sam" (1972). Anticipating critiques against neoliberalism's appropriation of male melodrama discussed in the previous chapters, "Jerry and Molly and Sam" suggests the limit of nurturing fatherhood as a lifestyle choice. Highlighting the unsolved tension between the frustrated white middle-class father and his dog and exploring the story's reference to an archetypical loyal pet story, *Lassie Come-Home*, this chapter illuminates the white middle-class father's unfulfilled desire to control the animal other as a psychological

anchor against neoliberal risk. The protagonist sees his dog as a symbol of feminized and racialized dependency, whose anarchy destroys his home from within; the white middle-class father's attempt to get rid of the dog suggests his (mis)appropriation of the emergent neoliberal governmentality which promotes the incarceration of racial and animal others.

Chapter 1–Reproducing the Hard-Boiled Consumer:

Human Capital and Makeover Culture in *Early Autumn*

When hard-boiled fiction writer Robert B. Parker died of a heart attack in January 2010 at age 77, crime fiction writer Jim Fusilli remembered him as "largely responsible for the rejuvenation in the 1970s of the hard-boiled genre of crime fiction."[1] Parker's literary influence over contemporary hard-boiled fiction is very strong; crime fiction writer Harlan Coben (over)states that "[when] it comes to detective novels, 90% of us admit he's an influence, and the rest of us lie about it."[2] The winner of 2002's Grand Master of the Edgar Awards, Parker is best known for his Spenser series, which features the hard-boiled detective Spenser, who has no first name. Parker published his first Spenser novel, *The Godwulf Manuscript,* in 1973 and continued to publish Spenser novels almost annually until 2010.[3] Almost all of his Spenser series—more than forty novels—became national bestsellers, and more than four million copies had been sold by 2010.[4]

Hard-boiled fiction is a uniquely American literary genre, which features a tough protagonist with an individualistic code of honor. The protagonist—most conventionally a white male detective—single-handedly confronts various types of vice in the urbanized and capitalistic world. Characterized by a laconic and understated prose with occasional wisecracks, hard-boiled

---

[1] Jim Fusilli, "Robert B. Parker, An Appreciation." *The Wall Street Journal*, 19 Jan. 2010. Patricia Sullivan also describes that Parker "helped revive the detective fiction genre." Patricia Sullivan, "Crime Novelist, Spenser Creator Robert B. Parker Dies at 77." *The Washington Post*, 20 Jan. 2010.

[2] Eric Konigsberg, "Paperback Writer." *The Atlantic Monthly* (July/August 2007).

[3] After Parker's death in 2010, popular hard-boiled fiction writer Ace Atkins has succeeded Parker as the author of the Spenser series. In 2016 the forty fourth Spenser novel *Slow Burn* was published.

[4] "Master Crime Novelist Robert B. Parker Dies." *The Guardian* 20, Jan. 2010.

fiction stylistically—as well as thematically—embodies the fantasy of stoic masculinity insulated from emotion. As literary critic Christopher Breu discusses, beginning in 1920s America, early hard-boiled fiction attended to white male readers' gender anxiety caused by the development of Fordism, resuscitating "older fantasies of masculine individualism and worker autonomy [against] the collectivized world of corporate capitalism."[5] Seeking control and autonomy in their automated workplace, these readers welcomed an independent hero who defied bureaucratic control.

Thus, the development of hard-boiled fiction went hand in hand with New Deal liberalism. They stemmed from the same root: white men's anxiety about the excesses of capitalism. As literary critic Sean McCann discusses, the emergence of hard-boiled detectives in the U.S. echoed the rise of New Deal liberalism in the 1930s: "Those key moments in the making of the genre came, in short, during periods when liberalism itself was in profound transition and when the social forces prodding its development threatened to tear the very idea of a liberal society to pieces."[6] Hard-boiled fiction became popular in the 1930s when Franklin D. Roosevelt established the innovative liberal regimes of the welfare state; both FDR and hard-boiled fiction writers worried that "the [traditional] liberal vision of a society of self-governing individuals [culminated] in the libertarian image of a universal law of the markets."[7] This is not to say, though, that hard-boiled fiction embraced the emergence of New Deal liberalism. Rather, it

---

[5] Christopher Breu, *Hard-Boiled Masculinities* (Minnesota: UP of Minnesota, 2005), 6. See also Erin A. Smith, *Hard-Boiled: Working-class Readers and Pulp Magazines* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 2000), 26-32.

[6] Sean McCann, *Gumshoe America: Hard-Boiled Crime Fiction and the Rise and Fall of New Deal Liberalism* (Durham: Duke UP, 2000), 6. For the relationship between New Deal liberalism and American literature in the 1930s in general, see Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Verso, 1997).

[7] McCann, *Gumshoe America,* 29-30.

critically explored the limit of both libertarian individualism and the expanded power given to the federal government by New Deal liberalism.[8] Therefore, hard-boiled fiction was an ambivalent cultural response to the reconstruction of liberalism in the Fordist America.

Family played a central role in both the reconstruction of liberalism in the 1930s America and hard-boiled fiction. The Great Depression raised anxiety about the role of the family, and the role of the family as the caretaker was supplemented by New Deal liberalism's invention of the modern welfare state.[9] Resonating with New Deal liberalism's intervention into the domestic sphere, hard-boiled detectives like Dashiell Hammett's Continental Op and Raymond Chandler's Philip Marlowe are constantly concerned with family issues. As literary critic Leonard Cassuto discusses in *Hard-boiled Sentimentality*, hard-boiled fiction often dramatizes the conflict between family-oriented sympathy and market-driven individualism.[10] Oscillating between the utopian vision of familial unity and its impossibility, the private eye's hard-shelled appearance paradoxically highlights, by demonstrating its "cracks in the armored exterior," his yearning for the family as a unit of sympathy.[11]

---

[8] As McCann argues, hard-boiled fiction oscillates between the utopian vision of public order and its impossibility: "On occasion [hard-boiled fiction] envisioned, like FDR, the emergence of a redemptive popular voice, one capable of overcoming social fragmentation and bureaucratic restriction to reform the basic order of society. . . . At the other extreme, hard-boiled crime fiction would sometimes echo Cain's suggestion that no such redemptive common expression could be imagined—that public life was fated to remain an aggregate of alienated private meanings. More frequently, hard-boiled crime fiction landed somewhere between these poles, divided between a utopian version of a collective, 'public taste' and a realization of the irresolvable plurality of contemporary society." Ibid, 30.

[9] For the New Deal liberalism's interaction with family issues, see Leonard Cassuto, *Hard-Boiled Sentimentality: The Secret History of American Crime Stories* (New York: Columbia UP, 2009), 67-91.

[10] Cassuto, *Hard-Boiled Sentimentality*.

[11] Ibid, 45.

Given this context for the emergence of hard-boiled fiction in the late 1920s and 1930s, what happened to the genre forty to fifty years later when dominant ideology shifted from New Deal liberalism to neoliberalism—and from Fordism to post-Fordism? If early hard-boiled fiction addressed the anxiety that "the [traditional] liberal vision of a society of self-governing individuals [culminated] in the libertarian image of a universal law of the markets," how does hard-boiled fiction in the age of neoliberalism illustrate the relationship between an individual and the market? How does the hard-boiled masculinity of the late-twentieth-century America interact with the neoliberal norm of entrepreneurship? How does contemporary hard-boiled fiction demonstrate the tension between the family and the market economy in the demise of the welfare state? In order to answer these questions, this chapter will examine the cultural interaction between Robert B. Parker's Spenser series and the emergent ideology of neoliberalism.[12] Particularly, I will focus on the seventh Spenser novel, *Early Autumn* (1981), since it attests most clearly to the ambivalent relationship between neoliberalism, family, and the market economy. This novel is distinctive among the Spenser series due to the relative absence of private-eye investigation; digressing far away from the tradition of hard-boiled fiction, Spenser's labor in this novel is reproductive rather than productive.

[12] Donna W. Harper, "Robert B. Parker." Ed. George Parker Anderson, *American Mystery and Detective Writers.* Detroit: Gale, 2005, 322. For the critical analysis of Spenser novels and their relationship with hard-boiled genre, see, for example, Cassuto 152-154; Fred Pfeil, *White Guys: Studies in Postmodern Domination and Difference* (New York: Verso, 1995), 105-162; Doug Robinson, *No Less a Man; Masulinist Art in a Feminist Age* (Ohio: Bowling Green UP, 1994), 39-105; David Gehein, *Sons of Sam Spade: The Private Eye Novel in the 70s* (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1980), 5-82, Paul Colby, *The American Thriller: Generic Innovation and Social Change in the 1970s* (New York: Palgrave, 2000), 55-66; Hans Bertens and Theo D'haen, *Contemporary American Crime Fiction* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 43-50; Leroy Led Panek, *New Hard-Boiled Writers 1970s-1990s* (Ohio: Bowling Green UP, 2000), 7-27.

Early Autumn encapsulates the market economy's reconstruction of family values. In *Early Autumn*, Spenser deeply sympathizes with Paul, a fifteen-year-old boy who is neglected by his parents. Saving him from his malicious parents, Spenser lives with Paul for four months to enhance his human capital and turn him into a good consumer and entrepreneur. Like his precursors, Spenser is a hardboiled hero who, in spite of his hard-boiled and stoic appearance, mourns the dysfunction of the family and benevolently rescues an innocent child. This is not news because, as Cassuto discusses, "the detached, hard-boiled loner of genre stereotype gets gentler and gentler over time, and more and more home-centered."[13] Nevertheless, Spenser's remaking of the familial bond is unprecedented; Spenser does not lament the market economy's invasion into the private realm at all. On the contrary, Spenser saves the child by teaching him the neoliberal ethos of entrepreneurship. Spenser embraces consumerism and the free market; he does not have any anxiety about a "libertarian image of a universal law of the markets" which New Deal liberalism and hard-boiled fiction in the 1930s criticized. Spenser's law, then, is that of the free market which underpins a white middle-class man's entrepreneurial lifestyle.

Spenser's paternal sympathy with the neglected child displays hard-boiled fiction's shift of focus to men's reproductive work. Hard-boiled fiction has been, since its origin, a cultural fantasy about an entrepreneurial lifestyle; however, while the entrepreneurial lifestyle of the detective was defined by his autonomous work in early hard-boiled fiction, Spenser reproduces the entrepreneurial subject in the domestic sphere. As literary critic Erin A. Smith discusses, readers of early hard-boiled fiction appropriated hard-boiled fiction as "allegories about workers' control and autonomy" in the rise of corporate capitalism.[14] In contrast, in the age of neoliberalism,

[13] Cassuto, *Hard-boiled Sentimentality*, 5.
[14] Smith, *Hard-boiled*, 80. See also Pfeil, *White Guys,* 111.

Parker draws on such a tradition of hard-boiled fiction and remakes "allegories about workers' control and autonomy" in the domestic sphere with a tint of entrepreneurship. In short, in *Early Autumn,* the hard-boiled detective's entrepreneurship is embodied by his reproduction rather than production.

Spenser's reproductive project hinges on his impulse to feel and identify with victimhood. Drawing on Cassuto's idea to counterpose hard-boiled fiction and women's sentimental literature as "two branches off the same middle-class tree," this chapter will analyze Parker's *Early Autumn* from the analytical framework of melodrama. In *Early Autumn,* the moral superiority of a white middle-class man is embodied by his hard-boiled action and hard body; Spenser is a chivalric hero who sympathizes with and rescues the innocent child when the American family as an institution has gone awry. *Early Autumn*'s oscillation between the scenes of mock domesticity and masculine action is shaped through "a dialectic of pathos and action."[15] *Early Autumn* offers a mixture of sympathy and sensational violence: threading a "careful middle path between feminization and hypermasculinity," Spenser underlines the morality of his hard body and violence.[16]

The paternal sympathy works as a marker of race and gender; in *Early Autumn*, Spenser's sympathy stands out all the more because it is contrasted with women's and African Americans' lack of familial sympathy. On the one hand, evoking the stereotyped image of the dependent single mother and the hyper-masculine African American man, *Early Autumn* suggests that only

---

[15] Linda Williams, "Melodrama Revisited," ed. Nick Browne, *Refiguring American Film Genres: History and Theory* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1998), 42.

[16] Cassuto, *Hard-Boiled Sentimentality*, 110. For the analysis of interrelationship between men's action and affect, see Jonna Eagle, *Imperial Affects: Sensational Melodrama and the Attractions of American Cinema* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP) and Cassuto, *Hard-Boiled Sentimentality*, 98-115.

white middle-class men can inculcate values of independence in the neoliberal world and dissipate the fear of a fatherless society. On the other hand, Spenser's friendship with the anti-familial African American man also mirrors Spenser's equivocal nurturing fatherhood; in spite of Spenser's devotion to surrogate fatherhood, he is secretly afraid of playing the part of a father in the long run. As such, the novel's stereotyped but ambivalent representation of whiteness and blackness reiterates Toni Morrison's seminal argument that the discourse of whiteness is constructed through the presence of African Americans as the shadow of white Americans.[17]

Consumerism plays a central role in Spenser's reconstruction of the familial bond. *Early Autumn* pivots around the paternal and urban scene as a melodramatic locus of innocence. While "[the] most classic forms of the [melodramatic] mode are often suffused with nostalgia for rural and maternal origins that are forever lost yet . . . refound, reestablished, or, if permanently lost, sorrowfully lamented," Spenser's paternal and consumerist virtue embodies a new type of innocence in a neoliberal world.[18] Innocence no longer means to stay away from the ravages of the market economy. In order to be deemed innocent in a neoliberal world, we always have to be active players in the market economy; in the age of neoliberalism, guilt is associated with dependency, which is embodied by the single mother in *Early Autumn*. Spenser's strenuous investment in the entrepreneurial and consuming subject is a sign of his innocence which solicits readers' vicarious identification.

Written exclusively from the standpoint of Spenser, *Early Autumn* normalizes the self-monitoring gaze of the "private eye" which constantly evaluates and judges the body as a part of human capital. Spenser relentlessly scrutinizes and makes over Paul's uncontrolled body; in *Early*

---

[17] Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and Literary Imagination* (New York: Harvard UP, 1992), 17.
[18] Williams, "Melodrama Revisited," 65.

Autumn, the private eye embodies the neoliberal norm of self-surveillance and makeover, which constantly evaluates our bodies.[19] As Nikolas Rose discusses, neoliberalism governs us "without governing society"; it governs us "through the regulated and accountable choices of autonomous agents."[20] Spenser is a savvy expert of an entrepreneurial and consuming lifestyle; he perfectly internalizes the neoliberal norm of self-monitoring and understands very well how to showcase the significance of human capital hidden under the body.

The Single Mother, Independence, and Post-Feminism in *Early Autumn*

Early Autumn underscores the ambivalent relationship between a market economy and the family by contrasting the image of an independent career woman with a dependent single mother. Demarcating the bright and dark sides of neoliberalism in the melodramatic lexicon of virtue and vice, these two women's contest over the significance of independence displays hope and anxiety about neoliberalism's remaking of women's gender roles. In *Early Autumn*, Patty Giacomin, a divorced woman in Lexington, Massachusetts, hires Spenser to protect her fifteen-year-old son Paul from her ex-husband who kidnaps Paul to "get even with [her]."[21] Spenser finds Paul and takes him back to Patty; however, to his surprise, Spenser finds out that Paul is not loved by his mother. On the very night that Spenser takes Paul back to his home, Patty asks Spenser to take him out to dinner; she does not like it when Paul interrupts her date with her new boyfriend. In

[19] According to Weber, the titles of makeover television shows frequently use metaphors of government authority: "Fashion Police , Operation Style , Mission: Organization , Garden Police , Arresting Design , Style Court , Style by Jury." Brenda R. Weber, *Makeover TV: Selfhood, Citizenship, and Celebrity* (Durham: Duke UP, 2009), 91.
[20] Nikolas Rose, "Governing 'Advanced' Liberal Democracies," ed. Andrew Barry, Thomas Osborne, and Nikolas Rose, *Foucault and Political Reason: Liberalism, Neoliberalism, and the Rationalities of Government* (Chicago: UP of Chicago, 1996), 61.
[21] Robert B. Parker, *Early Autumn* (New York: Dell, 1981), 43.

spite of her lack of interest in her own child, Patty tries to keep Paul in her house to claim alimony from her ex-husband. Highlighting Patty's moral deficiency as a mother, *Early Autumn* uses the stigmatized image of a single mother to evoke anxiety about the commodification of the familial bond.

Patty's neglect of her son updates the conventional image of the femme fatale in hard-boiled fiction. In typical hard-boiled fiction, the femme fatale's uncontrollable sexuality and her insatiable greed invoke the violation of traditional gender roles. The femme fatale is an antithesis of the mother: as Cassuto discusses, "the most important fear expressed by [the femme fatale] is the threat to the sanctity of the home as a place for family love and moral stability."[22] Characterized by her lack of maternal emotion and sympathy, the femme fatale refuses motherhood. In the age of neoliberalism, the femme fatale is embodied by the single mother who abandons her motherly obligation and destroys the sanctity of home by turning her child into a source of her unearned income. Patty is stone-cold as a mother; her neglect of the child is the most serious crime in the neoliberal world which constantly demands parents to invest their affection in order to maximize children's human capital.

In *Early Autumn*, Patty's lack of interest in Paul's well-being coincides with her excessive interest in sex and money; Patty's financial dependence on her ex-husband is intertwined with her sexual and psychological dependence on men. Patty cannot live without men in spite of her claim that self-fulfillment is indispensable for women. She states: "I must find some fulfillment of my own. . . . I can't just be a mother, as I couldn't just be a wife."[23] According to Patty, leaving Paul to a sitter and going to New York once a month is a "safety valve" for her; however, Spenser later

[22] Cassuto, *Hard-boiled Sentimentality*, 118.
[23] Parker, *Early Autumn*, 54.

finds out that the purpose of Patty's repeated trip to New York is to seduce men at a bar.[24] For Patty, "self-fulfillment" means abandoning the role of the mother and having sexual relationships with random men. Patty declares: "Men have the money and the power and if a woman wants some, she better get hold of a man."[25] Inverting the premise of second-wave feminism that being dependent on men hampers women's self-fulfillment, Patty achieves her "self-fulfillment" by underscoring her hypersexual dependence on men.

Patty's self-fulfillment and economic dependence look contradictory—dependent self-fulfillment is an oxymoron—nevertheless, it is not so surprising because neoliberalism often assumes single mothers as too selfish and lacking in discipline not to depend on paternal and/or governmental assistance. Also, neoliberalism often marks single mothers by their abject hypersexuality－their fecundity, in tandem with their purported lack of interest in investing in children's human capital, is deemed harmful to the austere state. As such, evoking the stereotyped image of the dependent single mother, *Early Autumn* underlines Patty's immorality in threefold ways: she is sexually promiscuous, irresponsibly destroys her son's human capital by neglecting him, and hitches a free ride on alimony. In short, Patty embodies the widely held anxiety about the fatherless society: there is no such thing as selfless devotion if the father is absent.[26]

Reinforcing the film noir's convention of representing the world in the binary of light and darkness, *Early Autumn* implicitly marks Patty as black in spite of her whiteness. As cultural theorist Manthia Diawara discusses, "[women] . . . in *film noir* are 'Black' by virtue of occupying

[24] Ibid, 55.
[25] Ibid, 55.
[26] For the analysis of the representation of single mothers in the neoliberal discourse, see Sara De Benedictis, "'Feral' Parents: Austerity Parenting under Neoliberalism." *Studies in the Maternal* 4.2 (2012), 1-21.

indeterminate and monstrous spaces that Whiteness traditionally reserves for Blackness in our culture. . . . From a formalist perspective, a film is *noir* if it puts into play light and dark in order to exhibit a people who become 'Black' because of their low moral behavior."[27] In *Early Autumn,* Patty embodies the monstrous femininity traditionally associated with blackness in the neoliberal era: hypersexuality, lack of interest in children's human capital, and financial dependence. In a sense, the novel's association of a white middle-class woman's single motherhood with the stereotype of black matriarchy is a harbinger of Charles Murray's fear a decade later that the black culture of fatherlessness is threatening the integrity of white families and the nation state (Murray's essay will be discussed more in Chapter Four).[28]

In contrast with Patty, Spenser's life-long partner Susan Silverman is a darling of neoliberalism: she is psychologically and financially independent from men and truly self-fulfilling. According to Spenser, she "fears dependency, despite, in fact because of, its attractiveness to her."[29] Susan first appears in the second Spenser novel *God Save the Child,* and she keeps her committed relationship with Spenser (despite their brief separation in *The Widening Gyre, Valediction* and *Catskill Eagle*) until the latest Spenser novel. Despite her lifelong commitment with Spenser, Susan maintains her independence as a professional woman. Susan takes pride in her entrepreneurial profession as a psychiatrist, and she occasionally asks Spenser to stay away from her when she feels he is jeopardizing her independence at the workplace.[30] In

---

[27] Manthia Diawara, "Noir by Noirs: Towards a New Realism in Black Cinema." *African American Review* 27.4 (1993), 525. For the analysis of race in film noir, see also Eric Lott, "Whiteness of Film Noir." *American Literary History* 9.3 (1997), 542-566 and Jans B. Wager, *Dames in the Driver's Seat: Rereading Film Noir* (Austin, UP of Texas, 2005), 29-35.
[28] Charles Murray, "The Coming White Underclass." *Wall Street Journal,* October 29, 1993, A14.
[29] Robert B. Parker, *A Catskill Eagle* (New York: Dell, 1985), 108.
[30] In *Crimson Joy*, when Susan's client turns out to be a suspect of the murder cases Spenser tries to unravel (he turns out to be a serial killer), she strongly opposes Spenser's intervention in her work. Susan declares to Spenser: "To have my autonomy violated by the Red Rose business is

The Widening Gyre, Susan says to Spenser that "missing you is a price I have to pay in order to become completely me."[31] As this economic metaphor suggests, Susan achieves self-fulfillment through her individual work.

Susan's profession of psychiatrist is also significant in its embrace of self-government, which is counterposed with Patty's lack thereof. As Nikolas Rose discusses, "[psychological] expertise now holds out the promise not of curing pathology but of reshaping subjectivity. On every subject from sexual satisfaction to career promotion, psychologists offer their advice and assistance . . . . The apostles of these techniques proffer images of what we could become, and we are urged to seek out, to help fulfill the dream of realigning what we are with what we want to be."[32] Susan stays away from Spenser when he makes over Paul's body and soul, but her profession suggests how she personally "[fulfills] the dream of realigning what [she is] with what [she wants] to be"; Susan's profession is the marker of her self-fulfillment.

In this way, *Early Autumn* does not simply stigmatize women's self-fulfillment; rather, Susan's right choice and Patty's wrong choice attest to "the selective incorporation of feminism for its efficacy" in the emergent discourse of postfeminism.[33] As feminist critic Shelly Budgeon discusses, "a discourse which focuses on the selective successes certain women enjoy is often

---

nearly intolerable . . . And to have you or Hawk here watching over me . . . is very bitter. . . . you must understand that it is like letting you into something that is mine. It is like giving away part of me, to have you question me about my patients." She cannot let Spenser into "something that is hers": Susan respects the privacy of her client even at the expense of Spenser's detective work. Robert B. Parker, *Crimson Joy* (New York: Dell, 1988), 120.

[31] Robert B. Parker, *The Widening Gyre* (New York: Dell, 1983), 109.

[32] Nikolas Rose, *Governing the Soul: the Shaping of the Private Self* (London: Free Association Books, 1999), xxxi.

[33] Shelly Budgeon, "The Contradictions of Successful Femininity: Third-Wave Feminism, Postfeminism and 'New' Femininities." *New Femininities: Postfeminism, Neoliberalism and Subjectivity*. Eds. Rosalind Gill and Christina Scharff (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 281.

universalized and used to justify the postfeminist argument that feminism, with its focus on gender inequality, discourages women from embracing female empowerment and as such encourages detrimental identifications."[34] Two women in *Early Autumn*—Susan and Patty—depart from the same place but takes different paths: Susan is economically and psychologically independent while Patty is not, and such a difference is associated with Patty's "detrimental identifications" with femininity. They have both experienced a divorce and they keep a "single" status: they refuse to be a mother/housewife. However, while Susan achieves her economic independence by working as a psychiatrist, Patty relies on alimony. Similarly, while Susan is an equal partner of Spenser, Patty believes that "we get a lot further batting our eyes and wiggling our butts."[35] The financial and psychological freedom Susan enjoys as an individual is the counterpoint to Patty's feminized dependency and hypersexuality; Susan's success epitomizes how "postfeminist sensibility re-centres . . . whiteness," while Patty's dependency is associated with blackness.[36]

Demonstrating the binary choices women have, *Early Autumn* obscures and severs the bond between women. Aligning with the ideology of neoliberalism, postfeminism represents women as individuals rather than members of a gendered collective: "[being] a man or a woman . . . [is] seen to be less meaningful than what one could claim to be as an *individual*."[37] Spenser's

---

[34] Ibid, 283.
[35] Parker, *Early Autumn*, 70.
[36] Rosalind Gill, "Postfeminist Media Culture: Elements of Sensibility." *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 10.2 (2007), 162-163. Spenser makes favorable remarks about independent women throughout the series; in sixth work *Looking for Rachel Wallace*, Spenser makes friends with his client Rachel Wallace, a prominent feminist and lesbian who claims "a woman can be fulfilled without a husband and children." Rachel Wallace reappears time and again in the following Spenser novels to help him. Robert B. Parker, *Looking for Rachel Wallace* (New York: Dell, 1980), 43.
[37] Budgeon, "The Contradictions of Successful Femininity: Third-Wave Feminism, Postfeminism and 'New' Femininities," 286.

individualistic view endorses such a discourse because he is "sick of movement . . . [and] people who think that a new system will take care of everything."[38] Like Susan, Spenser sees himself as an individual rather than a man while Patty sees herself as a woman. Patty lazily relies on the alimony by choice when the chance of becoming, say, an independent psychiatrist is equally given to her and Susan. As such, *Early Autumn* endorses the neoliberal culture of postfeminism in which "structural issues are transformed into personal matters for which private solutions must be found."[39] The single mother is far from a victim in such a discourse; instead, the precariousness of the neglected child offers a point of identification in *Early Autumn* as I will discuss shortly.

Hard-boiled Fatherhood

As Cassuto argues, hard-boiled fiction's general distrust of mothers is a mirror image of the melodramatic power of maternal sympathy demonstrated in nineteenth-century women's sentimental novels. However, hard-boiled fiction does not simply lament the absence of the mother's self-less devotion; filling the lacuna of melodramatic sympathy, the hard-boiled detective often occupies the moral and emotional center of the novel as a surrogate father. In *Early Autumn,* Spenser becomes Paul's surrogate father.[40] After Spenser takes Paul back to Patty's house, Patty asks Spenser to be Paul's sitter. Spenser agrees, but he does more than that: he takes Paul into the Thoreauvian woods in Maine and lives there with him for nearly four months. Spenser eventually refuses to return Paul to either of his parents when Patty asks him to;

[38] Robert B. Parker, *The Promised Land* (New York: Dell, 1976), 18. As for Spenser's "hostility towards communality," see Pfeil, *White Guys*, 135-137.
[39] Angela McRobbie, "Feminism, the Family and the New 'Mediated' Materialism." *New Formations* 80-81 (2013), 128.
[40] Spenser and Paul's familial relationship lasts throughout the Spenser series. For example, in *The Widening Gyre*, Paul comes back to Spenser's house for Thanksgiving and discusses with him his relationship with Susan. Parker, *The Widening Gyre*, 67-73.

Paul chooses to stay with Spenser rather than his parents. Calling himself "Mr. Warm," Spenser does not shy away from displaying his sentimentality.[41]

Highlighting the moral conflict between the benevolent nurturing father and the neglectful mother, *Early Autumn* solicits melodramatic identification with the hard-boiled detective who heroically remakes the familial and emotional bond to rescue the innocent child from the broken family. When Patty asks Spenser to go out with Paul on the first night Paul returns to his home, Spenser deeply sympathizes with Paul: "I felt sorry. . . . I think if I got sent off to eat with a stranger my first night home I'd be down about it."[42] Putting himself in the shoes of a fifteen-year-old neglected boy, Spenser—in spite of his hard-boiled appearances—shows his melodramatic sensibility of identifying with the victim. Spenser never lets Paul walk into his house alone when their dinner is done: saying to Paul "it's never any fun going into an empty house. I'll walk with you," Spenser, more than anybody in the novel, fully understands the significance of home and fills in the lacuna of familial sympathy.[43] Paul is a victim who is not loved by anybody; Spenser's moral high ground is provided by his fatherly sympathy with such an innocent boy.

Sympathizing with the neglected child whose human capital is left undeveloped, Spenser inculcates values of independence and entrepreneurship in the neoliberal world. Turning the family into the locus of self-investment, Spenser exhorts Paul to be independent: "Autonomous. Dependent on yourself. Not influenced unduly by things outside yourself. You're not old enough. It's too early to ask a kid like you to be autonomous. But you got no choice. Your parents are no help to you. If anything, they hurt. You can't depend on them. They got you to where you are.

---

[41] Parker, *Early Autumn*, 27.
[42] Ibid, 34-35.
[43] Ibid, 38.

They won't get better. You have to."[44] A fifteen-year old boy has to become an independent man because his parents are not dependable. Springtime for a child is shorter in the age of neoliberalism; early autumn has come to a fifteen-year-old boy, whether he likes it or not.

On the one hand, *Early Autumn* evokes anxiety about the commodification of the family; without attending to Paul's interest, Mel and Patty's custody battle turns him into a commodity. On the other hand, *Early Autumn* champions the marketization of the family in the age of neoliberalism. As a surrogate father, Spenser asks Paul to find a job worth spending his life on; in answer to Spenser's suggestion, Paul trains himself to become a ballet dancer. Spenser's home-schooling demonstrates how investment in children's human capital becomes a significant asset in the neoliberal world. According to family historian Steven Mintz, in the early nineteenth century middle-class Americans "sheltered their children from the workplace and economic struggles and kept them in school and the family home longer than in the past."[45] As Mintz outlines, the significance of American childhood has changed little by little; by the 1970s, though, it came to the point where "many parents turned away from an older ideal of a 'protected' childhood and began to emphasize a 'prepared' childhood. Fearful that their children were surrounded by risks and dangers, parents rejected the notion that it was best to shelter children from adult realities in order to preserve their innocence."[46] Childhood under neoliberalism is not free from the market, and it demands children to become entrepreneurial subjects as fast as possible.

Seeing Paul as an individual rather than a child, Spenser's entrepreneurial education is intertwined with the neoliberal norm of self-responsibility. *Early Autumn* underlines Spenser's

---

[44] Ibid, 123.
[45] Steven Mintz, *Huck's Raft: A History of American Childhood* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard UP, 2004), 76.
[46] Ibid, 343.

morality; his entrepreneurial education saves an innocent child from the alleged crisis of motherhood and the nation state. When Paul asks Spenser to leave him alone, Spenser explains him why he has to be independent:

> "Why don't you just let me alone?"
>
> I sat back down beside him. "Because everybody has left you alone all your life and you are, now, as a result, in a mess. I'm going to get you out of it." . . .
>
> "It's not my fault."
>
> "No, not yet. But if you lay back and let oblivion roll over you, it will be your fault. You're old enough now to start becoming a person. And you're old enough now so that you'll have to start taking some kind of responsibility for your life. And I'm going to help you."[47]

Regardless of his age and his family problems, it is his fault—not a government or community's—if Paul cannot be independent in this neoliberal world. In this sense, Spenser's entrepreneurial education embodies Ronald Reagan's moral promise to "uphold the principles of self-reliance, self-discipline, morality, and—above all—responsible liberty for every individual."[48] It is little wonder, then, that Spenser's home-schooling stems from his distrust of public education and welfare-youth service. Stating the Office for Children "got enough trouble fighting for their share of federal funds," in the middle of Reagan's welfare reform, Spenser supplants the corrosion of not only the nuclear family but the welfare state.[49] As Elisabeth Anker

---

[47] Parker, *Early Autumn*, 122-123.
[48] "Ronald Reagan's Announcement for Presidential Candidacy." *Ronald Reagan Library.* 13 Nov. 1979.
[49] Parker, *Early Autumn*, 43. As for Reagan's welfare reform, see Melinda Cooper, *Family Values: Between Neoliberalism and the New Social Conservatism* (New York: Zone Books, 2017), 63-66 and 98-107 and Robert O. Self, *All in the Family: the Realighment of American Democracy Since the 1960s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012), 367-398.

argues in her analysis of Ronald Reagan's inaugural address, "[melodramas] often use victimization to point out oppression and injustice, and here—in a cruel but not unusual melodramatic twist—injustice is caused by the very force that claims to protect individuals: the government."[50] Drawing on the individualistic lexicon of melodrama, Spenser changes the crisis of American families into an opportunity for championing nurturing father's neoliberal self-investment in children's human capital.

The Whiteness of Fatherly Sympathy

In *Early Autumn,* Spenser's fatherly sympathy is accentuated by other characters' emotional callousness; especially, Hawk's lack of sympathy functions as a counterpoint to Spenser's constant care for Paul. Hawk is a hyper-masculine African American man who helps with Spenser's job throughout the series; he mostly undertakes dirty and hyper-violent work that Spenser would not do. To borrow from popular crime fiction novelist Dennis Lehane, Hawk is "the unrestrained id of the otherwise above-board main character."[51] Since he does not have sympathy for anyone except Spenser and Susan, he can carry out his tasks in cold blood. At the end of *Early Autumn,* Spenser and Hawk assault a Mafia leader who orders his people to shoot Spenser and Susan. Spenser beats him badly until he collapses to the ground. Hawk urges Spenser to kill him, but Spenser refuses: "I can't kill a man lying there on the floor." In response, Hawk

[50] Elisabeth R. Anker, *Orgies of Feeling: Melodrama and the Politics of Freedom* (Durham: Duke UP, 2014), 104.
[51] Dennis Lehane, "Voice of the City," Ed. Otto Penzler, *In Pursuit of Spenser: Mystery Writers on Robert B. Parker and the Creation of an American Hero*, 35. He also discusses how Hawk has functioned as an archetype of the "dark angel" figure in contemporary American crime fiction. See Lehane, "Voice of the City," 34.

bluntly says "I can" and shoots him in the middle of the forehead.[52] Hawk's mercilessness stands out in this scene because it is counterpoised against Spenser's leniency and morality.

Unlike Spenser, Hawk has no interest in the familial bond; Hawk is too individualistic, and his hard-shelled masculinity prevents him from sympathizing with others. In the ninth Spenser series *Ceremony,* when Susan asks Spenser to invite Hawk for Thanksgiving dinner, Spenser replies "[you] just don't have Hawk for Thanksgiving dinner."[53] As such, Parker naturalizes Hawk's isolation from the family. In the nineteenth Spenser series *Double Deuce,* Hawk says to Spenser: "It never seemed a good idea to believe in [love] . . . . Always seemed easier to me to stay intact if you didn't."[54] In *Double Deuce,* Hawk has a brief relationship with an African American journalist, but eventually he chooses to break up with her. The impossibility of long-lasting relationship for Hawk works as a counterpoint to Spenser's committed relationship with Susan because otherwise Hawk is a double of Spenser—they are both independent and tough. Indeed, Parker states in an essay: "Hawk is, and the racial pun intended, the dark side of Spenser. He is what Spenser might have been had he grown up black in a white culture."[55] Parker both criticizes and participates in the toxic masculinity represented by an African American man. In short, Hawk embodies the hard-boiled masculinity in its original and purest form: as Cassuto argues, early hard-boiled detectives are rarely family men.

---

[52] Parker, *Early Autumn*, 210.
[53] Robert B. Parker, *Ceremony* (New York: Dell, 1982), 126. Discussing "the mother of thanksgiving" Sarah Josepha Hale's proposal of repatriation of blacks to Africa, Amy Kaplan states: "Thanksgiving polices the domestic sphere by making black people, whether free or enslaved, foreign to the domestic nation and homeless within America's expanding borders." Amy Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2002), 36.
[54] Robert B. Parker, *Double Deuce* (New York: Berkley Books, 1992), 220.
[55] Robert B. Parker, "Commentary on *Promised Land,*" *New Black Mask,* 1 (1985), 22.

The intertwined relationship between hard-boiled and African American masculinity is not Parker's invention, however; hard-boiled masculinity originally appropriates the stereotyped image of African American masculinity. In *Hard-Boiled Masculinities*, Breu discusses: "A primarily, though not exclusively, white conception of male identity, hard-boiled masculinity was surreptitiously modeled on an understanding of black masculinity, as vitally and violently primitive."[56] The idealized image of hard-boiled masculinity in the early twentieth century secretly borrowed from the collective fantasy of African American men as savage and/or rapists because hard-boiled masculinity needed to distinguish itself from Victorian moral manhood.[57] This is not to say that Hawk evokes the abiding fantasy of the black rapist; sexually, Hawk is always polite. Nevertheless, Breu's argument that "white masculinity defined itself in relationship to a whole range of sexual and social fantasy figures associated with black virility" still rings true in *Early Autumn*: Hawk's uncontrolled hyper-masculinity and his lack of affect work as a counterpoint to Spenser's juggling of hard-boiled masculinity and familial sympathy.[58]

Such racial dynamics in traditional hard-boiled fiction in general and Spenser novels in particular enact Toni Morrison's seminal argument about the tendency of canonical American literature. In *Playing in the Dark,* Morrison argues that "[white] Americans choose to talk about themselves through and within a sometimes allegorical, sometimes metaphorical, but always choked representation of an Africanist presence."[59] Hawk's repression of his emotion is, then, symptomatic. Hawk is a "shadow" of Spenser, but this "shadow" is indispensable to elucidate Spenser's extraordinary sympathy in chiaroscuro. In other words, Hawk is what Morrison calls "a

---

[56] Breu, *Hard-Boiled Masculinities*, 2.
[57] See Breu, *Hard-Boiled Masculinities* 32-36 and McCann, *Gumshoe America,* 39-86.
[58] Breu, *Hard-Boiled Masculinities,* 33.
[59] Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark*, 17.

dark and abiding presence that moves the hearts and texts of American literature with fear and longing."[60] Hawk's lack of familial sympathy evokes fear and longing at the same time: fear because white men are afraid of the fatherless society, longing because they secretly desire to abandon their fatherly obligations. The stereotyped image of African Americans in flight from their fatherhood addresses white middle-class Americans' complicated and contradictory feelings about fatherhood: they simultaneously want and do not want to be nurturing fathers.

Spenser negotiates such fear and longing. On the one hand, his surrogate fatherhood in *Early Autumn* highlights his fear of the fatherless society and works as a new cultural marker of white middle-class masculinity; Spenser's paternal sympathy underscores his embrace of neoliberal entrepreneurship and self-investment. On the other hand, it is equally important that Spenser plays only limited roles—as a "surrogate" father—in nurturing Paul; such limited roles show his ambivalence about playing a role of the father. Spenser, as it were, skims the cream off the top: he becomes a symbol of a sympathetic nurturing father without doing the dirty everyday jobs of, say, changing diapers. Indeed, when Susan asks him if he is ready to be a father, he replies no.[61] Susan further asks him: "Assuming you can keep him despite the best efforts of both parents and the law, which rarely awards children to strangers over the wishes of the parents. But assuming that you can keep him, are you prepared to support him through college? Are you prepared to share your apartment with him? Go to P.T.A. meetings? Maybe be a Boy Scout leader?"[62] Spenser simply says "no" to all of these questions; Spenser cannot see himself being a perpetual caretaker.

---

[60] Ibid, 33.
[61] Parker, *Early Autumn*, 135.
[62] Ibid, 156.

Spenser's equivocal devotion to fatherhood attends to the emerging division of reproductive gender roles in a neoliberal society.[63] White middle-class men might participate in care work as long as it does not contain the element of labor; their primary job is to reproduce the entrepreneurial subject who would invest in him/herself, and the painstaking domestic labor is left to women. In this way, the novel's divided attitude toward the purported African American culture of fatherlessness illuminates white middle-class men's hope and anxiety about the emerging norm of post-nuclear family; Spenser's fatherly performance intricately fulfills the contradictory fantasy of remaking and escaping from the family at the same time.

The Neoliberal Makeover and Masculine Bodies

Early Autumn turns a fifteen-year-old boy's makeover into a spectacle of self-investment and self-empowerment. As Nikolas Rose discusses in his seminal essay about neoliberal governmentality, in the neoliberal society "[individuals] are to become 'experts of themselves,' to adopt an educated and knowledgeable relation of self-care in respect of their bodies, their minds, their forms of conduct and that of the members of their own families."[64] The makeover culture turns us into an "expert[s] of ourselves"; "self-care" is an indispensable asset for enhancing our human capital. As cultural studies critic Tania Lewis argues, neoliberal makeover culture is shaped through "the figure of the self-governing citizen, an individual who is constructed as 'enterprising' and self-directed."[65] Enacting "the notion that individuals are 'free' to choose the

[63] See Robert L. Griswold, *Fatherhood in America: A History* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 222-228 and Arlie Hochschild and Anne Machung, *The Second Shift: Working Families and the Revolution at Home*. (New York: Penguin, 2012) for the analysis of American fathers' equivocal devotion to the nurturing role in the late twentieth century.
[64] Rose, "Governing 'Advanced' Liberal Democracies," 59.
[65] Tania Lewis, *Smart Living: Lifestyle Media and Popular Expertise* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 14. As for the analysis of the neoliberal makeover culture, see also Weber, *Makeover TV*,

style and type of life they want to live," neoliberal makeover culture carefully monitors and intervenes in the individual management of everyday life.[66] Sensationally highlighting the difference between "Before" and "After," the makeover narrative represents the Before-self as abject and deformed, which has to be reformed by the After-self. As Rose states, in the neoliberal world "the citizen is enjoined to bring the future into the present, and is educated in the ways of calculating the future consequences of actions as diverse as those of diet to those of home security."[67] Makeover culture, then, envisions the difference between our "present" and "future"; it nudges us to turn ourselves into an enterprising project to be worked upon, calculating the cost and benefit of self-improvement.

As cultural studies scholar Brenda R. Weber argues, in makeover culture "the body stands as the gateway to the self."[68] The entrepreneurial project of makeover often starts from reshaping the body; neoliberalism marks the body as human capital. Embodying hard-boiled and entrepreneurial masculinity, Spenser surveys, cares for and disciplines the neglected body of a fifteen-year-old boy. As Spenser observes, Paul's Before-body is undisciplined and restless: "His hands fidgeted on his lap. His fingernails were chewed short. He had hangnails."[69] According to Spenser, Paul's restless, Before-body shows his lack of self-government. Paul cannot govern his body because he has no self-reflexivity. Indeed, Paul frequently shrugs when he avoids making a decision; to borrow from Pierre Bourdieu, Paul's shrugging is a "bodily hexis" which shows his failure to internalize the neoliberal principle of choice.[70]

37-79.
[66] Ibid, 8.
[67] Rose, "Governing 'Advanced' Liberal Democracies," 58.
[68] Weber, *Makeover TV*, 5.
[69] Parker, *Early Autumn*, 25.
[70] Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1977), 94.

Neoliberal makeover culture reinforces the traditional norm of gendered bodies; Spenser's reproduction of the subject of choice starts from building the masculine body.[71] Paul's Before-body is not only undisciplined but weak: he is very thin, cannot run a mile, and thinks big men with muscles, like Spenser, are "ugly."[72] As an expert of masculine lifestyle, Spenser makes a man out of Paul: while living together, he teaches Paul how to weightlift, jog and box. Spenser explains to Paul why lifting weights is crucial: "You got nothing. You care about nothing. So I'm going to have you be strong, be in shape, be able to run ten miles, and be able to lift more than you weigh and be able to box. I'm going to have you know how to . . . work hard and to push yourself and control yourself."[73] The trained white male body is a marker of his strong will to endure the pain to gain upward mobility; drawing on Richard Dyer's seminal analysis of white male bodybuilders, Weber discusses that the makeover discourse relies on the American myth of rugged masculinity and self-control.[74] Resuscitating the tradition of white masculine self-control and self-determination in the era of risk and insecurity, Spenser's makeover illustrates how the white male body is instrumental for surviving the neoliberal world; in the makeover culture "successful outcomes code economically, the After-body resonating with connotations of financial success and upward mobility."[75] Thus, Spenser's reproduction of the entrepreneurial self starts from rather conventionally masculine training—some might call it boot-camp style—to control the undisciplined body.

---

[71] For the analysis of makeover TV's remaking of masculinity, see Weber, *Makeover TV*, 171-213. See also Lewis, *Smart Living*, 67-87.
[72] Parker, *Early Autumn*, 29.
[73] Ibid, 123.
[74] Weber, *Makeover TV*, 174; Richard Dyer, *White* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 145-183.
[75] Weber, *Makeover TV*, 56.

The neoliberal makeover culture's embrace of DIY attests to not only its reinforcement of rugged masculinity but also the emergent norm of neoliberal entrepreneurship. In *Early Autumn*, in an effort to reconstruct Paul's masculinity, Spenser teaches Paul how to build a cottage from scratch. As Smith demonstrates, in early hard-boiled fiction the image of the private eye dovetails with that of skilled artisan workers who keep the autonomy and self-esteem at their workplaces in the age of modernization.[76] On the one hand, Spenser's embrace of artisan work stems from the tradition of hard-boiled fiction as such. On the other hand, Spenser and Paul's commitment to artisan work demonstrates how neoliberalism blurs the distinction between labor and leisure. When Paul asks Spenser why they do not use machines, Spenser replies: "[there's] no satisfaction in it. Get a gasoline post-hole digger and rattle away at this like a guy making radiators. Gas fumes, noise. No sense that you're doing it."[77] Raising typical concern about dehumanizing effects caused by machines, Spenser's DIY domesticity evokes the nostalgia about the artisan culture like his hard-boiled predecessors did; more importantly, though, Spenser insists on using their own hands because DIY encapsulates the spirit of entrepreneurship. Spenser chooses DIY homemaking to "get the pleasure of making something."[78] This mindset overlaps with Spenser's attitude against his work; he works not just for money but pleasure. When Paul and Spenser discuss why Susan works, Paul tells him he wouldn't work if he has enough money. Spenser replies: "She likes her work. Makes her feel good about herself. Me too. If you just did it for money, of course you'd want to quit. But if you do it because you like to . . ."[79] (ellipsis original). Then, Spenser asks Paul what he wants to do; he shrugs in response. Spenser and Susan choose

[76] Smith, *Hard-boiled*, 79-102.
[77] Parker, *Early Autumn*, 126.
[78] Ibid, 126.
[79] Ibid, 107.

their jobs because they love their profession. In contrast, Paul's Before-body does not understand the significance of work as a choice. He does not know the pleasure of entrepreneurial work, just like he is unwilling to use his own hands to build a cottage.

In the age of neoliberalism, an entertaining profession is instrumental for marking aspirational individuals as a new class distinguished from others. As Zygmunt Bauman discusses, "[an] entertaining job is a highly coveted privilege" enjoyed by very few.[80] One of Spenser's biggest jobs as a surrogate father, then, is to help Paul find an entertaining profession and make him over into an enterprising and entrepreneurial self; as cultural critic Eva Chen discusses, in the age of neoliberalism, "the boundary between the entrepreneur, conventionally coded as active, and the consumer, coded as passive, is erased as they are emphasized to be the producer of their own choices and calculators of their own risks."[81] Spenser's intimate sympathy as a surrogate father is marked by his benevolent effort to reproduce the neoliberal subject of (consumerist) choice, which is a "highly coveted privilege" given to few. In *Early Autumn*, Paul chooses to become a ballet dancer. As a profession, the ballet dancer embodies what Bauman calls "the aesthetic value of work": "[the] trick is . . . to efface altogether the line dividing vocation from avocation, job from hobby, work from recreation; to lift work itself to the rank of supreme and most satisfying entertainment."[82] Turning the self-invested, disciplined body into the spectacle, the ballet dancer epitomizes the effaced borderline between a consumer and a producer. Paul's parents oppose his being a ballet dancer because they think ballet dancers are "fags," but Spenser praises a ballet dancer for being a "fine athlete" and "gifted artist."[83] In other words, Spenser

---

[80] Zygmunt Bauman, *Work, Consumerism and the New Poor* (New York: Open UP, 2005), 34.
[81] Eva Chen, "Neoliberalism and Popular Women's Culture: Rethinking Choice, Freedom and Agency." *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 16:4 (2013), 444.
[82] Bauman, *Work, Consumerism and the New Poor*, 34.
[83] Parker, *Early Autumn*, 138.

suggests that the profession of the ballet dancer is not incompatible with rugged and DIY masculinity, while a male ballet dancer is stereotypically stigmatized as effeminate and snobby. As I will discuss more in the next section, *Early Autumn* is unique in its reconciliation of rugged masculinity and consumerism.

Sutured in the narrative of reshaping the body, melodramatic affect plays a crucial part in making over a subject of choice. As the lexicon of neoliberalism suggests, reform is always painful, and the melodrama of makeover entrenches the image of virtuous victims—whose inner beauty, innocence, and "true self" are clouded by his/her outer appearance—who heroically endure the pain of reform.[84] As Christine Gledhill argues, "[characteristically] the melodramatic plot turns on an initial, often deliberately engineered, misrecognition of the innocence of a central protagonist. By definition the innocent cannot use the powers available to the villain; following the dictates of their nature, they must become victims, a position legitimated by a range of devices which rationalise their apparent inaction in their own behalf."[85] Paul's inner innocence is concealed by his Before-body, and he cannot prove his innocence because he is a powerless victim who lacks self-reflexivity.

Drawing on the convention of melodrama, the neoliberal makeover culture turns the process of bodily reform into a sensational spectacle which solicits the identification of viewers/readers. As Weber's analysis of affect in makeover TVs demonstrates, the narrative of

[84] Matthew Eagleton-Pierce, *Neoliberalism: The Key Concepts* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 155.
[85] Christine Gledhill, "The Melodramatic Field: An Investigation," ed. Christine Gledhill, *Home is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film* (London: British Film Institute, 1987), 30.

makeover often relies on the dialectic move from humiliation to celebration.[86] In *Early Autumn*, Spenser's gaze first humiliates Paul's uncontrolled body. As the first-person narrator describes, "[Paul] was a short thin kid and his voice had a soft whine to it. He was wearing a short-sleeved vertically striped dress shirt that gapped open near his navel, and maroon corduroy pants and Top-Siders with the rawhide lacing gone from one."[87] The private eye represents Paul's body as shameful; underscoring the disorder of Paul's dressing, Spenser suggests "what not to wear."[88] As Jonna Eagle discusses, "[it] is the merger of morality and sensation that makes melodrama such an efficacious mode of representation": sensationally displaying Paul's neglected body as miserable and abject, *Early Autumn* morally justifies the private eye's thorough surveillance and makeover.[89] On the first morning Spenser lives together with Paul, Paul stays in his bed and refuses to take a shower. Spenser enforces: "I pulled him out, undressed him, and held him under the shower. It took about a half an hour." This looks humiliating, but Spenser quickly adds: "[it's] not easy to control someone, even a kid, if you don't want to hurt them."[90] As such, interweaving the elements of sensationalism and morality, the novel represents Paul's undocile body as deficient, which needs to be rectified by the morally virtuous expert.

In *Early Autumn*, Spenser relentlessly scrutinizes and humiliates Paul's uncontrolled body; nevertheless, far from decrying Spenser's lack of humane emotion, the novel underlines his emotional sensibility as a locus of morality. As Weber discusses, "visual monitoring in

---

[86] Weber, *Makeover TV*, 81-127; see also Lewis, *Smart Living*, 15.
[87] Parker, *Early Autumn*, 23.
[88] For the analysis of the popular makeover TV "What Not to Wear," see Angela McRobbie, "Notes on 'What Not To Wear' and Post-feminism Symbolic Violence." *Sociological Review* 52 (October 2004), 99-109. The significance of dressing as cultural/human capital will be discussed more fully in the next section.
[89] Eagle, *Imperial Affect*, 7.
[90] Parker, *Early Autumn*, 110.

makeovers is coded as a form of social care."[91] The private eye's scrutinizing gaze in *Early Autumn* is rather welcomed; in the neoliberal world "[the] gaze is always present, and shame falls on those who do not work hard enough to be pleasing to the gazer."[92] The intervention of the expert is normalized in neoliberal culture because we tend to believe that "the detritus of bodily living must be reformed and regulated in order for the larger social body to be sustained."[93] Spenser's rescue of the neglected body looks heroic; it invokes and eases our anxiety about the future of the larger social body in the purported absence of traditional caretakers—mothers and the welfare state. In other words, paradoxically, Spenser's gaze feels benevolent and intimate because it is humiliating in an outspoken manner. His gaze looks intimidating, but it helps Paul—an ignorant boy who does not understand why he has to invest in himself—internalize the standardized view of the market. Thus, Spenser's benevolent rescue is complete when Paul's After-body is turned into a pleasurable spectacle which amuses the eyes of savvy consumers.[94]

If Spenser's humiliating gaze on the Before-body hints at his underlying moral virtue, it is fully guaranteed by his unveiled sympathy with the makeover subject during and after the process of makeover. In *Early Autumn*, the sensational spectacle of makeover is morally upheld by Spenser's melodramatic identification with the abject body. When Spenser explains to Paul why he has to control himself and become an independent man, Paul starts to cry. Then, Spenser underscores his emotional sensibility: "[Paul] cried with his head down and his shoulders hunched and the slight sweat drying on his knobby shoulders. I sat beside him without anything

---

[91] Weber, *Makeover TV*, 82.
[92] Ibid, 85.
[93] Ibid, 21.
[94] At the end of *Early Autumn* Paul enters a boarding school for ballet dancers.

else to say. I didn't touch him. 'Crying's okay,' I said. 'I do it sometimes.'"[95] Spenser understands how makeover is painful for a young boy and eases the pain of reform by sympathizing with him. In the absence of maternal figures, the hard-boiled detective offers the moral and emotional center of the neoliberal world where the familial bond is threatened by the omnipresence of market values. Spenser embodies what Cassuto calls "sentimental action hero"; as Cassuto discusses, "[this] new sentimental man is no woman in drag. Instead, his aggression protects sentimental values. His violence defends the home and makes sentimental domesticity possible."[96] The hard-boiled detective's (reproduction of a) macho body and his sentimental tears look contradictory, but are actually not so: Spenser's violence is the marker of his sympathy, and his (reproduction of a) macho body looks moral because he does not refrain from showing his emotion.

As such, Spenser's makeover embraces the sentimental power of tears. One of the biggest problems of Paul's Before-body is that he does not know how to express his emotion. Paul's constant shrugging suggests that he avoids making a choice while concealing his own emotion. The second time Patty, in order to stay in her boyfriend's house, asks Spenser to take care of Paul for an indefinite period of time, Spenser does not miss how Paul represses his emotion: "[Paul] was staring hard at the network news. His shoulders were stiff and awkward. He was concentrating on ignoring us."[97] Locking himself in the hard shell, Paul conceals his emotion not to be hurt by his parents. Spenser's makeover, then, helps Paul find his "true self" hiding behind the hard shell. The ending of the novel is saturated with sentimental emotion:

---

[95] Parker, *Early Autumn*, 123.
[96] Cassuto, *Hard-boiled Sentimentality*, 112. See also Eagle, *Imperial Affects*.
[97] Parker, *Early Autumn*, 93.

> The woods had coalesced in the darkness now. You couldn't see into them. And the insects picked up the noise level. All around us was a thick chittering cloak of forest. We were alone at its center. The cabin was built and the champagne bottle was empty. Biting insects began to gather and swarm. The darkness was cold.
>
> "Let's go in and eat," I said.
>
> "Okay," he said. His voice was a little shaky. When I opened the door to the cabin I could see in the light from the kitchen that there were tears on his face. He made no attempt to hide them. I put my arm around his shoulder.
>
> "Winter's coming," I said.[98]

The first half of the ending is descriptive and very hard-boiled in its original sense: observed from the standpoint of the camera eye, the description is objective and shows little emotion. In contrast, the latter half of the ending gives a completely different impression to readers: the hard-boiled detective literally embraces a neglected boy who unashamedly sheds tears. Demonstrating the power of sentimentality, this ending solicits readers' sympathetic identification with the After-body. Drawing on the convention of melodrama, Spenser and Paul's wordless embrace attends to their emotional virtue: as Williams states, "[melodramatic] denouement is typically some version of this public or private recognition of virtue prolonged in the frozen tableau whose picture speaks more powerfully than words."[99] Spenser and Paul's bodies speak a lot more powerfully than words in this last scene: tears are a complicated signifier here, and can be understood as a sign of both the euphoric joy of makeover and pathetic sorrow of separation. In either case,

---

[98] Ibid, 221.

[99] Williams, "Melodrama Revised," 52. As for melodrama's reliance on the body as a signifier, see Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1976), 56-80.

though, *Early Autumn*'s makeover feels good because it entrenches the melodramatic image of men's emotional bodies.

The Hard-Boiled Consumer

In early hard-boiled fiction, consumerism was an antithesis of the stoic and rugged masculinity that the private eye embodies. As Smith's study about the uneasy negotiation between hard-boiled masculinity and consumerism shows, on the one hand, early hard-boiled fiction "functioned as 'how-to' manuals in class mobility for working-class readers, complete with stage directions on how to move, what to wear, and what to purchase."[100] Through the eyes of hard-boiled detectives working-class readers learned the "bodily hexis" of the bourgeoisie and pursued upward mobility.[101] However, more importantly, "[although] hard-boiled fiction demonstrated how to read and manipulate appearances, it distrusted commodity culture and the feminized consumers who were its most enthusiastic subjects."[102] In short, the hard-boiled fiction of the 1930s was a very ambivalent response to working-class readers' class status; while it demonstrated their desire for upward mobility, it championed working-class masculinity by contrasting it with "corrupt" highbrow culture of feminine consumerism.

This ambiguous tension between hard-boiled masculinity and consumerism is almost invisible in *Early Autumn*: in the neoliberal society where consumers' choice is normalized, the private eye's savvy observation about consumer items becomes a marker of his human capital, and his hard-boiled body is turned into a masculine spectacle which pleases the eyes of consumers. This is not to say, though, that reconciliation between masculinity and consumerism

[100] Smith, *Hard-boiled*, 104-105.
[101] Ibid, 106-107.
[102] Ibid, 113.

was brought overnight by *Early Autumn*. As cultural studies scholar Bill Osgerby outlines the history of masculine consumerism, "[consumption]-oriented models of American masculinity . . . did not suddenly materialize in the late 20th century. Instead, there exists a much longer history of masculine identities formed around stylistic display and the pleasures of consumerism."[103] *Early Autumn*'s difference from the masculine consumerism of the previous period lies in its unflinching embrace of consumerism for the purpose of reproducing the entrepreneurial self. As is most evident in *Playboy* magazine's champion of bachelorhood, masculine consumerism in early- and mid-twentieth-century America challenged not only production-oriented but family-oriented masculinity; on the contrary, *Early Autumn* dovetails masculine consumerism with the nurturing father's reproductive role.[104]

Spenser is a hard-boiled consumer paradoxically embracing consumerism in spite of his inculcation of masculine self-control.[105] His hard body is not incompatible with consumerism; rather, in a consumer society his masculine body is most appropriately adorned with elegant clothing because the hard body and stylish dress are equally marked as a consumer's choice which embodies the neoliberal assets of self-care and self-investment. Before going to the ballet concert with Paul, Spenser unabashedly describes his attire as "stylish": "I put on a blue suit and a white shirt from Brooks Brothers, all cotton, with a button-down collar. I had a blue tie with red

---

[103] Bill Osgerby, "A Pedigree of the Consuming Male: Masculinity, Consumption and the American 'Leisure Class.'" Ed. Bethan Benwell, *Masculinity and Men's Lifestyle Magazines*, 65. Lewis also outlines the history of masculine consumerism: see Lewis, *Smart Living*, 31-42.

[104] See Osgerby, "A Pedigree of the Consuming Male"; Joanne Hollows, "The Bachelor Dinner: Masculinity, Class and Cooking in *Playboy*, 1953-1961." *Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 16.2 (2002),143-155; Barbara Ehrenreich, *The Hearts of Men: American Dreams and the Flight from Commitment* (New York: Anchor Books, 1983), 42-51 and Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (New York: Oxford UP, 2012), 183-185.

[105] For the analysis of contemporary hard-boiled writers' embrace of consumerism, see Pfeil, *White Guys*, 121-162.

stripes on it, and I looked very stylish with my black shoes and my handsome Smith & Wesson in my right hip pocket. The blue steel of the barrel was nicely coordinated with my understated socks." Understatement is a trademark of early hard-boiled literature which champions the private eye's emotional detachment; nevertheless, rather than describing his prose in a hard-boiled and understated manner, Parker describes here how his "understated" socks match the color of the gun, which masculinizes his fashion style.[106] This might sound like a sarcastic self-parody of the hard-boiled literary style, but Spenser is totally serious about his fashion style. Spenser quickly contrasts Paul's shabby clothes with his: "Paul broke out a tan corduroy jacket and brown pants and a powder blue polyester shirt with dark blue pocket flaps. He wore his decrepit Top-Siders and no tie. His socks were black." Cynically stating "[that] is the ugliest goddamned getup I've seen since I came home from Korea," Spenser suggests that Paul's clothes are out of date and/or deviate from the cultural norm of whiteness.[107] The shift of focus to the fashion "style" in *Early Autumn* thus illustrates how the norm of masculinity transfers its attention from stoic self-control to consumerist choice.

As such, Spenser reproduces the entrepreneurial self by masculinizing consumerism. Spenser reproduces not only the hard body but a cultured man by teaching Paul how to perform as a middle-class consumer. As an expert of the entrepreneurial lifestyle, Spenser suggests how Paul is neglected by his parents: "[Paul's] clothes aren't right and they don't fit right. He doesn't know what to do in a restaurant. No one's ever taught him anything."[108] Paul needs immediate

---

[106] See Lee Clark Mitchell, "Diversions of Furniture and Signature Styles: Hammett, Chandler, Macdonald." *Arizona Quarterly* 71.3 (Autumn 2015), 2-10 and Frank Krutnik, *In a Lonely Street: Film Noir, Genre, Masculinity* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 40-41 for the analysis of early hard-boiled literature's embrace of understatement.
[107] Parker, *Early Autumn*, 130.
[108] Ibid, 41.

makeover because his body does not show any sign of cultural capital. For Spenser, children's education is not measured by the name of the school but the quality of human capital displayed by a consumer's body. In other words, education is less public and more hinged on parental choice as a consumer in the age of neoliberalism. Thus, after insulting Paul's clothes, Spenser takes him to Louis', an elegant boutique in Boston. Spenser hints at his ambivalence for elegant clothes by stating "I always have the impulse to whiz in the corner when I come in here. But I never do." However, if he truly scorned such clothes, he wouldn't come to this boutique so frequently. Spenser buys Paul "a charcoal three-piece suit of European cut, black loafers with tassels . . . , two white shirts, a red-and-gray striped tie, a gray-and-red-silk pocket handkerchief, two pairs of gray over-the-calf socks, and a black leather belt, . . . light gray slacks and a blue blazer with brass buttons, a blue tie with white polka dots, and a blue-and-gray-silk pocket handkerchief."[109] In a neoliberal world, it is a fatherly job to choose proper clothes for a son. In spite of American fathers' conventional anxiety that consumerism would spoil their children, it is not Spenser's job to separate his surrogate son from the materialistic world; rather, he imports values of the free market into his family and turns his surrogate son into a proper consumer.[110]

As such, the private eye's savvy knowledge about the bourgeois lifestyle is far from a digression in Spenser series, and fans of Spenser novels have received his expert knowledge as a showcase of proper consumption habits. For example, Spenser's love for cooking has been frequently discussed by his reviewers and fans. According to reviewers, Spenser "[attracts]

---

[109] Ibid, 132.

[110] As historian Natasha Zaretsky discusses, at the moment of oil crisis in 1973, American fathers thought that they were "robbed of their perceived role as economic regulators and a crucial source of paternal authority collapsed. The feared consequence was a middle-class family in which earlier ethics of thrift and self-discipline would be displaced by the new traits dictated by a mass consumption economy." Natasha Zaretsky, *No Direction Home: The American Family and the Fear of National Decline, 1968-1980* (Chapel Hill: UP of North Carolina), 92.

readers with insatiable appetites for both gore and garnishes. Soused shrimp are a favorite of his"; Spenser is "big and tough, yet literate—and a gourmet cook to boot"; "Mr. Parker can make Spenser a skillful cook and a quoter of literature"; "there are usual bits about Spenser's fastidious dress and his fondness for fancy food."[111] Given the limited page numbers of book reviews, such frequent reference to Spenser's cooking is surprising and underlines how readers of Spenser novels enjoy his bourgeois taste; as Bourdieu discusses, one's "taste" works as a marker of social distinction.[112]

Offering the vicarious fantasy of not only workplace autonomy but bourgeois and masculinized domesticity, Parker and Spenser's cooking transforms the significance of cooking as a domestic labor; cooking can be a moment of self-actualization with a little bit of extraordinary flavor. Cooking is a consumer's item for men rather than a feminine drudgery. An episode about Parker's fan meeting demonstrates how readers of Spenser novels enjoyed Spenser's gastronomic cooking. *The New York Times* reports that "[about] 140 people paid $100 apiece [on December 9, 1991] to sample dishes described in the next of Robert B. Parker's novels about Spenser."[113] As *The New York Times* describes, the dinner offered by Parker is very elegant:

> The dinner, [Parker] said, was based on food Spenser and his girlfriend, Susan Silverman, consume in "Paper Doll," which will be the 19th novel in the Spenser series. "They're a little more haute cuisine, but it's basically the same thing," he said. The menu opened with

---

[111] "From Super Sleuths, Great Meals to Die by," *The New York Times Book Review,* 5 Aug. 1981, C1; "Crime," *The New York Times Book Review*, 31 Jul, 1988, 25; "Books of the Times; Two Contrasting Murder Mysteries," *The New York Times Book Review,* 4 Jun, 1992, C18; Christopher Lehmann-Haupt, "Books of the Times; Definitions One and Two of the Term 'Hard Boiled,'" *The New York Times Book Review,* 20 May, 1993, C19.

[112] Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction* (New York: Harvard UP, 1984).

[113] "Spenser May Be Tough, But Not His Ideal Menu," *The New York Times Book Review,* 11 Dec. 1991, C10. Parker contributed the money he gained in this event to Community Servings, which delivered home-cooked foods to people who suffered from AIDS.

> seafood risotto with tomatoes and pistachio pesto, followed by roast chicken and grilled Savoy cabbage with wheatberry polenta and roasted pear. For dessert, there was a sour cherry tart.

Parker is not so far from a celebrity chef in the context of the twentieth-first century reality TV: to borrow from Lewis, Parker and Spenser's masculine cooking as pleasure reworks food "as a site of fun, spectacle, and fantasy lifestyles, distanced from the mundanity of everyday life and the labours of domesticity."[114] Parker's cooking is thus turned into a spectacle which showcases and increases the portfolio value of his human capital.

Early Autumn shows middle-class white men's ambivalent feelings in relation to their new obligation in their families. In Japan, a book called *Spenser's Cookbook* was published in 1985, which mostly consists of recipes and restaurant guide from Spenser novels.[115] In the preface of the book, Parker describes: "Spenser eats various types of foods, and my father taught me how to eat them. Although my mother cooked in my home, my father occupied the kitchen on the weekends."[116] On the one hand, Parker offers egalitarian gender roles: men can cook as well as women, just like men can be ballet dancers as well as women. On the other hand, Parker

---

[114] Lewis, *Smart Living*, 57. Similarly, In an interview for *the New York Times*, Parker answers the interviewer's questions while serving a full-course meal for the interviewer: a salad with grilled New York strip steaks, scallions, corn, this asparagus tips, romaine leaves, some light, fluffy homemade biscuits and a rich Kendall-Jackson pinot noir. "In the Kitchen with: Robert B. Parker; He Said He Had a Pistol; Then He Flashed a Knife," *The New York Times Book Review,* 11 Dec. 1991, C10.

[115] Also, a book called *Illustrated Encyclopedia of Spenser Novels* was published in Japan under Parker's supervision in 1990. This book, too, introduces Spenser's lifestyle to Japanese readers with illustrations of the characters and places; for example, first thirty pages or so are given to detailed information about the characters' dresses in Spenser novels. Takanori Hanafusa and Kazuo Hozumi, *Illustrated Encyclopedia of Spenser Novels* (*Spenser-wo-Miru-Jiten*, Tokyo: Hayakawa Shobou, 1990).

[116] Michio Higashi and Keiichi Baba, *Spenser's Cookbook* (*Spenser-no-Ryouri*, Tokyo: Hayakawa Shobou, 1985), 1.

distinguishes men's gender roles from women's by suggesting that men cook on the weekends for fun and women cook on the weekdays as an obligation. Similarly, when Paul remembers how his father disparages cooking as women's job, Spenser replies that his father was only half right: "[girls] cook, so do boys. So do women, so do men."[117] Spenser seems to support egalitarian gender roles; however, he disparages women's cooking. Spenser suggests how Patty's cooking is different from his own: "[steak,] peas, and baked potato, and a bottle of Portugese rosé. Innovative"; "Patty's idea of fancy was to put Cheez Whiz on the broccoli. I didn't mind that. I used to like the food in the army."[118] In a word, Patty's cooking is "boring" and déclassé. Cynically addressing Patty's lack of creativity, Spenser carefully distinguishes his embrace of domesticity from femininity.[119] As feminist critic Angela McRobbie describes in her analysis of re-normalization of middle-class motherhood in the neoliberal society, "[the] professionalisation of domestic life forcefully reverses the older feminist denunciation of housework as drudgery, and childcare as monotonous and never-ending, by elevating domestic skills and the bringing up of children as worthwhile and enjoyable."[120] This analysis is appropriate and significant in clarifying the transformed significance of domesticity, but not only women but men can partake in such domesticity; as *Early Autumn* suggests, men can even do a better job of enhancing children's human capital because they know better about the professional life.

In short, cooking is a (consumer's) choice for men. Cooking can attract them as long as it becomes a kind of leisure, not daily routine. As sociologist Michelle Szabo discusses, "men may see cooking as leisure because when they do it, they are positioned as culinary artists, creative

---

[117] Parker, *Early Autumn*, 62.
[118] Ibid, 51 and 64.
[119] See Hollows, "The Bachelor Dinner" for the analysis of masculinized food culture represented in *Playboy*'s cooking pages.
[120] McRobbie, "Feminism, the Family and the New 'Mediated' Materialism," 130.

hobbyists or stereotype breakers."[121] To put it differently, cooking has to be "interesting," not "boring." Bauman underlines the emergent stratification between "interesting" and "boring" works in a consumer society:

> Like everything else which may reasonably hope to become the target of desire and an object of free consumer choice, jobs must be 'interesting'—varied, exciting, allowing for adventure, containing certain (though not excessive) measures of risk, and giving occasion to ever-new sensations. Jobs that are monotonous, repetitive, routine, unadventurous, allowing no initiative and promising no challenge to wits nor a chance for self-testing and self-assertion, are 'boring.'[122]

Parker and Spenser's cooking attests to the new stratification of domestic labor; cooking is a pleasurable spectacle which overturns the traditional view of domesticity as boring and monotonous. The transformed norm of labor, then, also divides domestic work into two types: the domesticity embodied by Spenser is masculine, "interesting," pleasurable, and entrepreneurial while the domesticity embodied by Patty is feminine, "boring," suffocating, and marked by its lack of self-care.

In contrast to Patty's "boring" dishes, Spenser's cooking in *Early Autumn* works as a sign of his self-reflexivity. Showing off the private eye's quasi-expert knowledge on foods, Spenser's cooking is very creative in *Early Autumn*. For example, Parker carefully describes Spenser's cooking scene when he makes a dinner for Paul in place of his mother who goes out to New York for "self-actualization":

---

[121] Michelle Szabo, "Foodwork or Foodplay? Men's Domestic Cooking, Privilege and Leisure." *Sociology*, 47.4 (2012), 625.
[122] Bauman, *Work, Consumerism and the New Poor*, 34.

> I went to the kitchen and investigated. There were some pork chops. I looked into the cupboard. There was rice. I found some pignolia nuts and some canned pineapple, and some garlic and a can of mandarin oranges. I checked the refrigerator again. There was some all-purpose cream. Heavy would have been better, but one makes do. . . .
>
> I cut the eyes out of the pork chops and trimmed them. I threw the rest away. Patty Giacomin appeared not to have a mallet, so I pounded the pork medallions with the back of a butcher knife. I put a little oil into the skillet and heated it and put the pork in to brown. . . . When the meat was browned, I added a garlic clove. When that had softened, I added some juice from the pineapple and covered the pan. I made rice with chicken broth and pignolia nuts, thyme, parsley, and a bay leaf and cooked it in the oven. After about five minutes I took the top off the frying pan, let the pineapple juice cook down, added some cream, and let that cook down a little. Then I put in some pineapple chunks and a few mandarin orange segments, shut off the heat, and covered the pan to keep it warm. . . . I made a salad out of half a head of Bibb lettuce I found in the refrigerator and a dressing of oil and vinegar with mustard added and two cloves of garlic chopped up.[123]

This description looks like a recipe rather than a hard-boiled novel. Despite Spenser's condescending remarks, this is much more than a make-do meal. Spenser could have made much simpler dinner, but he takes enough time to "investigate" the kitchen instead of investigating the murder cases. If, as Smith discusses, "[for the 1930s' working-class] readers, hard-boiled detective stories were centrally concerned with the loss of workplace autonomy. . . and the diminished importance of production work compared with consumption," *Early Autumn* turns the hard-boiled detective's work into consumption, nullifying the distinction between production and

[123] Parker, *Early Autumn* 59-60.

reproduction.[124] While having the dinner with Paul, Spenser underlines how he "taught himself" how to cook; as he puts it, "[well,] I sort of made it up. I've eaten an awful lot of meals and some of them were in places where they serve food with sauces. I sort of figured out about sauces and things from that."[125] Spenser is a good cook because he is a good consumer. In this way, Spenser's entrepreneurial domesticity goes hand in hand with his embrace of consumerism; Spenser proves his responsibility as a father by making a spectacle of consumerism.

Conclusion

In *Early Autumn*, solving the bloody murder cases is secondary for Spenser because the biggest crime in the era of "infantile citizenship," to use Lauren Berlant's term, is Patty and Mel's neglect of their son.[126] Reproducing the entrepreneurial citizen who constantly invests in himself to enhance his portfolio value, Spenser saves not only Paul's undisciplined body but the national body from the threat of the fatherless society. Marking the nurturing father's benevolent sympathy as white middle-class, *Early Autumn* suggests who should bear the new burden of reproducing the entrepreneurial body.

Spenser is domestic but not domesticated. On the one hand, he breaks the convention of middle-class masculinity and hard-boiled fiction by reconciling masculinity and consumerism. On the other hand, Spenser's domesticity should be understood as performance, not daily household labor to which he is permanently committed. Spenser's domestic performance is certainly new for white middle-class men in general and hard-boiled detectives in particular, but it is not easy to

---

[124] Smith, *Hard-boiled*, 76.
[125] Parker, *Early Autumn*, 61-62.
[126] Lauren Berlant, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship* (Durham: Duke UP, 1997).

judge whether white middle-class men's conventional gender roles are set free or reinforced behind its liberating appearance. Spenser's equivocal performance as a surrogate father offers a glimpse into white middle-class men's unchanging anxiety about their fatherly obligations; enforcing the neoliberal principle of self-care, *Early Autumn* leaves the question of domestic labor unanswered—when "the worker tends to become the universal social subject: everyone is expected to 'work' and to be 'self-supporting,'" who should shoulder the burden of care?[127]

Turning domestic labor into an entertaining spectacle, *Early Autumn* effaces the borderline between the family and the market. However, rather than lamenting the lack of familial sympathy, *Early Autumn* underscores a white middle-class father's identification with the neglected boy and addresses his paternal sympathy through a sensational spectacle of makeover. Thus, Spenser's benevolent investment in the neglected boy's futurity is associated with his morality; Spenser's morality is marked by the masculine and entrepreneurial body that amuses the eyes of consumers. As such, *Early Autumn* embraces the omnipresence of market values in the neoliberal world; early hard-boiled fiction's anxiety about the universal law of the markets is gone, and new anxiety about self-government takes its place.

Spenser "investigates" the kitchen for gathering ingredients for dinner and champions his "understated" fashion style rather than describing his prose in an understated manner: in the age of neoliberalism, hard-boiled fiction is turned into a "how-to" manual of reproducing the self who constantly governs himself by the ethos of consumerism and entrepreneurship. Furthermore, Spenser's remaking of the masculine body attests to the portfolio value of the trained body as the

[127] Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon, "A Genealogy of 'Dependency': Tracing a Keyword of the US Welfare State." Nancy Fraser, *Fortunes of Feminism: From State-Managed Capitalism to Neoliberal Crisis* (New York: Verso, 2013), 101.

human capital: as Barbara Ehrenreich discusses, fitness is "a form of consumption in which indulgence was perfectly matched, second by second, with obvious, visible effort. It was consumption made strenuous and morally renewing, 'working out' as a balletic imitation of true work, in which the hedonism of consumption could be confronted head-on and vanquished with the slow burn of pyruvic acid in the muscles."[128] Reconciling consumption with strenuous masculinity and moral goodness, Parker repurposes hard-boiled fiction to demarcate the borderline between those who can govern themselves and those who cannot; the private eye in the age of neoliberalism epitomizes the omnipresence of the gaze which constantly monitors and judges the self-management of everyday life according to the value of white middle-class men's entrepreneurial consumerism.

[128] Barbara Ehrenreich, *Fear of Falling: The Inner Life of the Middle Class* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1990), 234.

Chapter 2–Rebellious Caretakers:

The Cider House Rules and Women's Reproductive Rights

Homeschooling is a remarkable by-product of neoliberalism which stems from the widely shared distrust of public education in the late twentieth century. As discussed in the previous chapter, Spenser privately teaches his surrogate son the ideals of neoliberalism. Similarly, John Irving's *The Cider House Rules* (1985) centers on Dr. Wilbur Larch, who privately trains his surrogate son Homer Wells in obstetrics in general and abortion in particular. Larch and Spenser's homeschooling approaches are very different: Larch has no interest in consumerism. Nevertheless, Larch's homeschooling also underscores the significance of human capital. As Michel Foucault argues, "the neo-liberals lay stress on the fact that what should be called educational investment is much broader than simple schooling or professional training and that many more elements than these enter into the formation of human capital."[1] In spite of its historical setting, *Cider House* also shares a lot with its contemporary ideology of neoliberalism. *Cider House* is set in the late nineteenth to early twentieth century when abortion was prohibited by law, and Larch secretly teaches Homer how to perform abortion without giving him an official medical education. Distrusting public education, Spenser and Larch's homeschooling suggests how white middle-class fathers play an active role in nurturing human capital; thanks to their surrogate fathers' homeschooling, Paul and Homer become experts (a ballet dancer and an obstetrician) whose professional abilities and skills turn into "a sort of enterprise for

[1] Michael Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the College De France 1978-1979* (New York: Picador, 2004), 229.

[themselves]."[2] The domestic bliss of the 1950s' nuclear family is over, but fathers still know best: they can privately teach what teachers cannot tell in public.

In *Cider House*, human capital is created by entrepreneurial white middle-class fathers, who secretly control women's bodies. This chapter closely examines *Cider House* because no other novel clearly bears witness to white middle-class fathers' complicated and contradictory response to the politics of abortion and its intertwined relationship with neoliberalism during the 1980s.[3] By positioning *Cider House* and the politics of the pro-choice movement within a neoliberal framework, this chapter aims to critically examine the cultural significance of the family as a choice. The theme of entrepreneurial self-making and abortion overlap in *Cider House* because they both hinge on a choice. On the one hand, *Cider House* supports the pro-choice movement and ushers in the family liberated from the conventional norm of the nuclear family: it asserts that no law or ideology should intervene in one's choice about families in general and babies in particular. On the other hand, the story induces anxiety about the abuse of familial freedom: what if someone exploits such a choice in the vacuum of the written/unwritten law on families? *Cider House* negotiates such hope and anxiety about the family's liberation in the age of neoliberalism by drawing a distinct borderline between the right choice and the wrong choice; not surprisingly, the right choice in the novel is made by white middle-class fathers while others make the wrong choice.

---

[2] Ibid, 225.

[3] There are relatively small number of novels and films which focus on the theme of abortion in the late twentieth century. See Helena Wahlström, "Reproduction, Politics, and John Irving's *The Cider House Rules*: Women's Rights or 'Fetal Rights'?" *Culture Unbound* 5 (2013), 253. For the in-depth analysis of twentieth century American literature's representation of abortion, see Judith Wilt, *Abortion, Choice, and Contemporary Fiction: the Armageddon of Maternal Instinct* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1990). Also, William Marsiglio points out that in spite of the extensive body of scholarship on abortion, aspects of men's relationship with abortion are lacking. See William Marsiglio, *Procreative Man* (New York: New York UP, 1998), 4 and 91.

In short, *Cider House* is a story about choosing the family revolving around two protagonists: Wilbur Larch and Homer Wells. On the one hand, drawing on the framework of melodrama, *Cider House* embodies the moral triumph of white middle-class male medical experts, Dr. Larch and Homer, who embrace abortion as a choice. On the other hand, it locates the story of Larch and Homer creating alternative families of their own in opposition to the dominant ideology of the nuclear family. Ostensibly, the story looks liberating; Larch and Homer stand up against the fixed gender roles and break the rules to make families flexible and choice-based. However, the story looks different when seen from the perspectives of others: it endows choice about the family to white middle-class fathers while women and people of color are free only to the extent that white fathers liberate them.

When Irving published *Cider House* in 1985, "pro-life" and "pro-choice" supporters were entangled in a huge national debate about abortion as a result of the epoch-making decision about women's reproductive rights in *Roe vs. Wade* in 1973. In spite of *Roe*'s basic decision to protect women's access to abortion, women's reproductive rights in the U.S. were not fully secured. Along with neoconservatism, neoliberalism played a central role in limiting women's basic rights to terminate a pregnancy. While *Roe* made abortion itself legal, public support for abortion gradually declined as neoliberalism gained immense popularity in the late twentieth century. Congress passed the Hyde Amendment in 1977, which prohibited federal funding for abortions except when mothers' lives were in danger. Throughout the 1970s, many states prohibited the use of public funding for abortion as well.[4] As historian Rickie Solinger puts it,

[4] Rickie Solinger, *Pregnancy and Power: A Short History of Reproductive Politics in America* (New York: New York UP, 2007), 207. Similarly, Laura Briggs and William Saletan argue how neoliberalism controlled the politics of abortion in the late twentieth century. See Laura Briggs, *Somebody's Children: The Politics of Transracial and Transnational Adoption* (Durham: Duke UP, 2012) and William Saletan, *Bearing Right: How Conservatives Won the Abortion War*

"the government would not criminalize abortion, but neither would the government pay for it, no matter where that left a poor woman. The Court and the Congress made access to reproductive options a market matter, not a matter of gender, racial or economic equality, or human rights."[5] The anti-abortion campaign enjoyed broad support mainly because under the banner of shrinking government, people believed that abortion should be turned into a consumer's choice; the fact that anti-abortion campaign was successful does not necessarily mean that the religious and moral debate made by neoconservatives appealed to the majority of Americans as they intended. As historian Laura Briggs discusses, neoconservatives and neoliberals made a temporary coalition in stigmatizing certain types of women's—most typically, single mothers of color—reproductive behavior.[6] While neoconservatives blamed them for deviating from the norm of the nuclear family, neoliberals insisted that their sexual carelessness was turning into a burden on taxpayers.[7] Their purpose differed, but their interest coincided in the unmaking of abortion as one of women's basic rights.

As the very term suggests, the discourse of the "pro-choice" movement is inseparable from neoliberalism. Overall, the "pro-choice" movement advocated for abortion as a woman's choice, not as a part of her basic human rights.[8] Supported by the rhetoric of neoliberal deregulation, "pro-choice" supporters tried to incorporate a part of pro-life supporters on their side, suggesting that the government did not have a right to intervene into the family's privacy. Yet, ironically, this very rhetoric also justified the denial of public funding for abortion. Solinger explains: "In a

(California: UP of California, 2004).
[5] Solinger, *Pregnancy and Power*, 202.
[6] Briggs, *Somebody's Children*, 94.
[7] Robert O. Self, *All in the Family: The Realiginment of American Democracy since the 1960s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012), 367-383.
[8] Saletan, *Bearing Right*, 9-30.

country weary of rights claims, choice became *the* way liberal and mainstream feminists could talk about abortion without mentioning the 'A-word.' Many people believed that 'choice'—a term that evoked women shoppers selecting among options in the marketplace—would be an easier sell; it offered 'rights lite,' a package less threatening or disturbing than unadulterated rights."[9] A plethora of Americans, including both liberals and conservatives, vehemently opposed "rights" provided by the government; neoliberalism stigmatizes "rights" by contrasting it with "choice." As a result, the "pro-choice" movement dissolved bonds between women. By embracing women's individualistic and market-oriented "choice," the "pro-choice" movement successfully justified abortions made by wealthier women, while resourceless women were left behind. Abortion was, thus, turned into a question of neoliberal "choice" rather than empowering women in general in the late twentieth century.[10] As William Saletan discusses, this was not what mainstream feminists originally intended, but the threat of losing *Roe* was so powerful in the 1980s that they had to sacrifice the racial and class aspects.[11]

Emphasizing the agency of white middle-class fathers in choosing their families, *Cider House* also denies abortion as part of women's basic human rights. The novel's focus on abortion is equivocal, and *Cider House* centers around the love between (surrogate) fathers and sons. *Cider House* represents the love between fathers and sons as "queer," prohibited by social norms (e.g. Oedipus complex). On the one hand, *Cider House* represents white middle-class fathers as victims whose choice in their families is limited. On the other hand, it celebrates the moment when fatherly love finally "comes out of the closet." As such, *Cider House* can be read as a

[9] Rickie Solinger, *Beggars and Choosers: How the Politics of Choice Shapes Adoption, Abortion, and Welfare in the United States* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001), 5.
[10] Saletan, *Bearing Right*, 41-42.
[11] Ibid, 44.

melodramatic and masochistic narrative which features, to borrow from Sally Robinson, "white men displaying their wounds as evidence of disempowerment, and finding a pleasure in exploration of pain."[12] However, Larch and Homer are far from disempowered: I argue that the novel's disclosure of white middle-class fathers' "queer" love is used to reinforce their power in the cloak of victimhood.

In contrast, motherly love is totally absent in *Cider House*. In spite of the novel's primary focus on the issue of abortion, most of the female characters in *Cider House* are helpless victims who do not have agency and voices of their own and thus are represented as a gendered group rather than individuals. In *Cider House*, fatherly sympathy replaces motherly love, which has traditionally played a central role in melodrama. Vigorously contesting the ideology of the nuclear family which naturalizes the love between mothers and children, *Cider House* illustrates a utopian world for fathers; mothers are finally gone from their home, and fathers' love for children is placed at the center of the narrative. In light of this, *Cider House* fits into Susan Bordo's argument that the making of nurturing men and the father's rights movement went hand in hand with the obliteration of pregnant women's agency.[13] *Cider House* represents white middle-class men as "embodied selves" who are suffused with agency while pregnant women are turned into "mere bodies."[14]

It is not only the absence of mothers that helps white middle-class fathers' identity formation. Drawing on melodrama's Manichean conflict between virtue and vice, Larch and Homer's fatherly sympathy stands out all the more because it is implicitly contrasted with

---

[12] Sally Robinson, *Marked Men: White Masculinity in Crisis* (New York: Columbia UP, 2000), 11.
[13] Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* (Berkley: UP of California, 2003), 71-97.
[14] Ibid, 74 and 76.

working-class and African American men's hideous domestic violence. In *Cider House*, the author represents working-class and African American fathers as criminals; their domestic violence turns women into helpless victims who are eventually saved by Larch and Homer. As in the Spenser series, fatherly sympathy and benevolence become a cultural marker of the white middle-class; white middle-class fathers rescue mothers by offering abortions while working-class and African American fathers cause unwanted pregnancies stemming from violence. Unlike "pro-life" discourse, *Cider House* does not blame women for the circumstances leading to their wanting or needing abortions; rather, the novel targets the "irresponsible" working-class and African American fathers. Making such a class and racial boundary between fathers resonates with the neoliberal politics of abortion which condemn working-class and African American families' "irresponsible" reproduction while justifying abortion itself.[15] The United States ostensibly legitimized abortion after *Roe vs. Wade* regardless of race and class; however, race and class remain important factors which determine whether one can have an abortion.[16] *Cider House* champions such a janus-faced politics of abortion in the age of neoliberalism.

Fatherly Love in *Cider House* and the Ideology of the Post-nuclear Families

In *Cider House*, white middle-class men's personal choice about the family replaces public law. The small community of St. Cloud's, where Dr. Larch illegally performs abortions and is "the only law," can be seen as a utopian neoliberal society for Homer and Larch; they deregulate the unwritten familial law of blood and marriage, making it a private matter.[17] The orphanage/abortion clinic of St. Cloud's receives federal support, but Dr. Larch intricately

[15] See Solinger, *Pregnancy and Power*, 232.
[16] Ibid, 217.
[17] John Irving, *The Cider House Rules* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1985), 101.

conceals the fact from the Maine State board of trustees that he regularly performs not only deliveries but abortions in St. Cloud's. Larch is an individualistic entrepreneur who does not believe in the welfare state. When Nurse Caroline (who is often called a "socialist" by the narrator) claims that "abortions [are] not only a personal freedom of choice but also a responsibility of the state—to provide them," Larch blurts: "Once the state starts providing, it feels free to hand out the rules, too!"[18] For Larch, the rules are what an individual like him—a white middle-class medical expert—should make, not the state; in spite of his suggestion that abortion should be legal, he does not agree with the idea that the state should pay for abortion. Thus, Larch's view on abortion endorses the Hyde amendment of 1976 which prohibits federal funding for abortion.[19] Besides, the narrator's use of the word "socialist" is a bit of rhetorical sleight of hand. Nurse Caroline believes that abortion should be provided as part of women's basic human rights. However, by calling her a "socialist," *Cider House* turns the issue of women's rights into the question of the government's intervention into the market economy.

Embracing post-nuclear families, Homer and Larch choose their own families in *Cider House*. As the novel's focus on abortion and adoption suggests, in this fiction the biological bonds with blood parents/children are replaced with the alternative familial relationship they (re)create.[20] Larch and Homer's construction of the surrogate family denaturalizes the myth of the nuclear family which consists of biological father, mother, and children. The family according to Larch and Homer is flexible; the family is not a given for them, and their familial

---

[18] Ibid, 447.
[19] For the Hyde amendment and the class politics of abortion, see Self, *All in the Family*, 377.
[20] Maria Holmgren *Troy*, Elizabeth *Kella* and Helena *Wahlström*. *Making Home: Orphanhood, Kinship, and Cultural Memory in Contemporary American Novels* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014), 127.

negotiation becomes a focal point of the story. Born in St. Cloud's and raised by Larch and the nurses in the hospital, Homer gradually comes to believe that St. Cloud's is his home. At first Larch tries to find foster parents for Homer, but he finally gives up the idea and becomes the surrogate father for Homer.

As such, *Cider House* underlines one's choice in the making of the family; while the norm of the nuclear family is based on the law and biology, the norm of the post-nuclear family hinges on one's choice. It is important to remember, though, that the story entirely focuses on white middle-class men's decision-making about the family. As Troy, Kella and *Wahlström* argue, "the challenge [Larch and Homer] launch against the nuclear family ideal may be effectual precisely because they occupy a position of racial privilege."[21] Thus, "choice" in *Cider House* should be understood as a kind of neoliberal privilege given exclusively to white middle-class men; as I will discuss later, working-class/African American's families in *Cider House* are marked as aberrant and primitive rather than post-nuclear. In addition to his surrogate-familial relationship with Larch, Homer also chooses his families when he becomes a parent. The plot of *Cider House* is primarily concerned with his invention of familial relationships. Homer's family is far from conventional. He adopts his biological son Angel, and Homer and Angel live with Candy and her husband (also Homer's best friend), Wally. Angel's biological mother is Candy, who secretly keeps her relationship with Homer. Homer's family is post-nuclear in that it doesn't have a fixed and stable "nucleus" in any sense. In terms of the law, Wally and Candy are married; in terms of the biological parentage, Angel is a son of Homer and Candy; and in terms of imagination, the four of them all believe that they are one family. It is noteworthy that not only characters but the narrator of the novel advocates for the family as a choice. In one scene, Homer tells Angel the

[21] Ibid, 126.

joy of making alternative family bonds: "You've got no reason to *feel* adopted . . . You've got three parents, really. The best that most people get is two." Then, the omniscient narrator of the novel immediately endorses Homer's comment: "Candy had been like a mother to him, and Wally was a second father—or the favorite, eccentric uncle. The only life Angel had known was a life with all of them."[22] Overall, the narrator of *Cider House* is a shadow of white male protagonists whose voice uncritically champions white men's opinions. Thus, alternative family bonds represented in this fiction are not just Homer's naïve desire; the narrator gives authenticity to the post-nuclear forms of the family Homer imagines.

Cider House illustrates how Larch and Homer choose families in both private and public realms; the novel's focus on fatherhood as choice goes hand in hand with male doctors' choice in reproduction. Dr. Larch embraces the ideology of "pro-choice." When he discusses the pros and cons of abortion with Homer, he states: "Do *I* interfere? When absolutely helpless women tell me that they simply *can't* have an abortion, that they simply *must* go through with having another-and yet another-orphan: do I interfere? . . . I give them what they want: an orphan or an abortion."[23] Dr. Larch clarifies here that he respects women's choices; choices should be made by women, not a male doctor. Yet, it is difficult to take his comment at face value; the novel rarely depicts a pregnant woman making a decision of her own, and it represents Dr. Larch as a medical expert who benevolently makes a reproductive choice in place of her. For example, when a pregnant woman comes to St. Cloud's, she becomes silent in response to Dr. Larch's question. Instead, the narrator emphasizes Dr. Larch's response to her body:

[22] Irving, *The Cider House Rules,*, 438.
[23] Ibid, 186.

> Dr. Larch bent so close to the speculum, he had to hold his breath. The smell of sepsis and putrefaction was strong enough to gag him if he breathed or swallowed, and the familiar, fiery colors of her infection (even clouded by her discharge) were dazzling enough to blind the intrepid or the untrained. But Wilbur Larch started to breathe again, slowly and regularly; it was the only way to keep a steady hand. He just kept looking and marveling at the young woman's inflamed tissue; it looked hot enough to burn the world. Now do you see, Homer? Larch asked himself. Through the speculum, he felt her heat against his eye.[24]

The nameless woman is turned into a "mere body" in this scene, borrowing from Bordo. On the contrary, Dr. Larch is an "embodied subject" who has the power to diagnose her body and make the right decision. In spite of the pain this woman must have, the story focuses on Dr. Larch's "daring" act of confronting her putrefying body. Moreover, Dr. Larch silently speaks to Homer in the middle of his surgery; the nameless woman is a medium without agency through which the surrogate father and son have a debate about the significance of women's reproduction.[25] As such, Larch's words and actions are very contradictory: he states that he respects women's reproductive freedom, but the novel does not describe him doing so. Women's reproductive choice works as a sort of cloak under which men secretly reinforce their own neoliberal right to choose.

Instead of focusing on women's reproductive choice, *Cider House* fleshes out Homer's choice of performing abortion or not. *Cider House* demonstrates an illusion of neoliberalism:

---

[24] Ibid, 490.

[25] Similarly, when Homer is performing the big surgery for a woman who has puerperal convulsions, Homer "was beginning to worry more about Dr. Larch than about the woman, and he had to fight down his fear of something happening to Dr. Larch in order to concentrate on his job." Irving, *The Cider House Rules,* 134.

everybody is seen as a "free agent" when in fact only a very few—namely, white middle-class men—have the resources to make choices. In *Cider House*, the human capital Dr. Larch endows to Homer turns him into a pro-choice doctor who controls women's bodies. Unlike Dr. Larch, Homer originally is "pro-life," albeit partially. While living in St. Cloud's, Homer works as a medical assistant for Dr. Larch and quickly becomes a skilled obstetrician thanks to Larch's enthusiastic home-schooling. However, after dissecting a nine month old baby's (or fetus') dead body upon Larch's request, Homer is convinced that an unborn baby has a life of its own.[26] Homer states: "You can *call* it a fetus, or an embryo, or the products of conception . . . but whatever you call it, it's alive. And whatever you do to it . . . —and whatever you call what you do—you're killing it. . . . It's [Larch's] choice—if it's a fetus, to him, that's fine. It's a baby to me . . . . If Larch has a choice, I have a choice, too."[27] Homer's comment echoes pro-life discourse because he calls it a baby rather than a fetus. Therefore, Homer refuses to help Dr. Larch perform abortions; yet, when Dr. Larch dies, Homer decides to succeed his surrogate father's business and illegally perform abortion, finally accepting Dr. Larch's pro-choice beliefs. Homer is finally convinced that women should choose whether or not to abort. Nevertheless, the novel's central concern on the white middle-class fathers/doctors' choice obscures women's agency in choosing families. This is obvious in Homer's comment quoted above; "choice" here means men's choice rather than pregnant women's. As literary critic Alison Booth puts it, "*The Cider House Rules* remains largely an individualist bildungsroman. . . . It turns out, not

[26] The narrator calls it a "child," "embryo," "fetus," and "baby." Irving, *The Cider House Rules,*168.
[27] Ibid, 169.

surprisingly, that self-help is a man's—a white, straight man's—business. It turns out that abortion, and even rape and father-daughter incest, are about a man's right to choose."[28] In *Cider House*, family is ultimately what white middle-class men choose that it will be.

In *Cider House*, white middle-class men's choice pivots around their power to empathize with others. Larch's righteousness as an individual provider of abortion is underpinned by his moral goodness rather than rationality: as the narrator puts it, "[he] was not a systems man, he was just a good one."[29] In spite of Larch's expert knowledge on obstetrics, he is represented as a man of common sense whose virtue is marked by his melodramatic feelings. As Jonna Eagle argues, in melodrama "[we] imagine morality to be lodged most compellingly at the level of feeling rather than of thought, such that virtue calls forth its own instinctive recognition."[30] When Larch and Nurse Caroline discuss the responsibility of the state, Larch's aversion to society is buttressed by his sentimental identification with babies:

> "Oh, I can't always be right," Larch said tiredly.
>
> "Yes, I know," Nurse Caroline said sympathetically. "It's because even a good man can't always be right that we need a society, that we need certain rules—call them priorities, if you prefer," she said.
>
> "You can call them whatever you want. . . . I don't have time for philosophy, or for government, or for religion. . . ." said Wilbur Larch.

---

[28] Alison Booth, "*Neo-Victorian Self-Help*, or Cider House Rules." *American Literary History* 14.2 (2002), 289.
[29] Irving, *The Cider House Rules*, 447.
[30] Jonna Eagle, *Imperial Affects: Sensational Melodrama and the Attractions of American Cinema* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP), 11.

> Always, in the background of his mind, there was a newborn baby crying; even when the orphanage was as silent as the new, remaining, abandoned buildings of St. Cloud's—even when it was ghostly quiet—Wilbur Larch heard babies crying.[31]

In spite of Nurse Caroline's truism that "it's because a good man can't always be right that we need a society," the narrator's melodramatic identification with Larch (which overlaps with Larch's sentimental identification with crying babies) finally endorses Larch's view that abortion should be provided by individuals (i.e. male doctors) rather than the state. No matter how a woman is worried about the abuse of power by an individualistic male, his moral righteousness is guaranteed by his extraordinary power of sympathy with vulnerable babies: only Larch hears babies crying.

Underlining white middle class fathers' melodramatic emotion, *Cider House* remakes the family into men's sphere. In *Cider House,* the narrator repeatedly highlights the love between (surrogate) fathers and sons: "Larch looked at Homer; God, how he loved what he saw! Proud as a father, he had trouble speaking."[32] Similarly, when Homer suddenly chooses to leave St. Cloud's to work in Ocean View, an apple orchard run by Candy and Wally's family, Larch tries to express his love for Homer but he cannot: "He might have told Homer, then, that he loved him very much . . . He wanted to take Homer Wells in his arms, and hug him, and kiss him, but he could only hope that Homer understood how much Dr. Larch's self-esteem was dependent on his self-control. And so he said nothing."[33] Larch's fatherly love is both repressed and evoked in these scenes; the narrator unveils Larch's fatherly love while Larch is afraid to show his emotion in public. *Cider House* looks melodramatic because Larch and Homer feel as if their emotional

---

[31] Irving, *The Cider House Rules,* 447.
[32] Ibid, 116.
[33] Ibid, 206.

bond is prohibited and thwarted; as Larch's use of the term "self-control" suggests, they struggle with the traditional norm of masculinity which forces men to conceal their emotion.[34]

In spite of Larch and Homer's masculine control of their emotion, *Cider House* does not cover up their fatherly love. Larch and Homer's emotion is represented as a truth that resides under the surface, which looks more poignant for its blockage. In this way, it subverts the cultural stereotype that men can't feel: fathers are "softer" than one usually thinks. When Homer finishes the overnight surgery for a pregnant woman who has fatal puerperal convulsions, Larch comes home and kisses Homer while Larch thinks he is sleeping. The narrator describes: "Homer Wells cried because he'd never known how nice a father's kisses could be, and he cried because he doubted that Wilbur Larch would ever do it again—or would have done it, if he'd thought Homer was awake."[35] As Linda Williams discusses, the "feeling that something important has been lost . . . is crucial to crying's relation to melodrama."[36] Homer's tears become a marker of his victimhood; fatherly love is constantly threatened and closeted, and *Cider House* solicits the reader's pathetic identification with the father and son rather than the woman whose body is severely hurt in the process of delivery.

In this way, *Cider House* represents the love between Larch and Homer as closeted and "queer"; the novel turns them into victims whose feelings are not fully understood in American society. The father-son love in this novel stands out all the more because the novel represents it as repressed: indeed, one of the board of trustees calls Larch a "nonpracticing homosexual" and

---

[34] See Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (New York: Oxford UP, 2012) for the significance of self-control in the discourse of normative masculinity.
[35] Irving, *Cider House Rules*, 138-139.
[36] Linda Williams, "Melodrama Revisited," ed. Nick Browne, *Refiguring American Film Genres: History and Theory* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1998), 70.

"obviously queer."[37] Nevertheless, the love between the father and son was far from repressed and punished in American society; as Griswold discusses, "love and involvement, not discipline and authority, [became] the hallmarks of the modern father" since as early as the 1920s.[38] The rheFtoric of queerness in *Cider House* suggests that fatherhood is unreasonably jeopardized by the ideology of the nuclear family; according to their standpoints, fathers are "sexual minorities" whose love for children in general and sons in particular is tabooed. Therefore, Homer intricately conceals and reveals his secret love for his son Angel: "[Homer] grabbed Angel in a headlock and they started wrestling. Wrestling with Angel was one way Homer could keep in close physical contact with the boy—long after Angel had grown self-conscious about being hugged and kissed, in public. A fifteen-year-old boy doesn't want his father draped all over him, but wrestling was perfectly respectable; that was still allowed."[39] Homer knows what he can and cannot do in public. Larch and Homer break the basic rules of the nuclear family; their affection centers on their sons rather than women.

In light of this, it is noteworthy that *Cider House* repeatedly calls attention to the vulnerability of white middle-class fathers' (reproductive) bodies. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Irving is consistent in depicting (the anxiety of) men's amputated bodies in general and reproductive dysfunction in particular. For example, his second novel *The Water-Method Man* (1972) is about a divorced father who suffers from urinary pain.[40] In his fourth and most well-known novel *The World According to Garp* (1978), one male character's penis is bitten off;

[37] Irving, *Cider House Rules*, 434.
[38] Griswold, *Fatherhood in America*, 101.
[39] Irving, *The Cider House Rules*, 463.
[40] For the analysis of interaction between men's blocked emotion and men's reproductive dysfunction in *The Water-Method Man*, see Robinson, *Marked Men*, 140-145.

Garp's father is wounded in the war and "raped" by his mother; and Garp is finally killed by an insane feminist.

Irving's persistent focus on the vulnerability of men's bodies often overshadows his novels' concern about sexual violence against women. In *Marked Men*, literary critic Sally Robinson discusses his novels and states that "[the] spectacle of the white male body in pain, then, works to displace feminists . . . from a position of personal *and* political authority, while installing white men . . . in the morally unassailable position of victim."[41] Indeed, in *Cider House*, Wally is wounded in the war. His legs are paralyzed and he loses reproductive capacity; wearing women's clothes and make-up to deceive the enemy's eyes, he is literally feminized in the war.[42] In addition, when young Dr. Larch has sexual intercourse with a professional woman for the first (and last) time in his life, he has a nightmare in which his penis falls off.[43] Furthermore, when Homer's first adoption ends in failure, Dr. Larch writes about Homer who never stops crying: "[it is as] if he were being circumcised . . . As if someone were snipping his little penis—over and over again, just snipping and snipping it."[44] In these three scenes, war, prostitutes and absence of parental affection evoke anxiety of white middle-class fathers over the vulnerability of their bodies. Wailing in pain, the loss, real or imagined, of the penis "projects onto men as equal status as victims of sexualized and gendered violence."[45] Given the novel's focus on the issues of abortion, it is surprising that the reproductive anxiety of white middle-class fathers overwrites that of mothers. Robinson further argues that Irving's representation of white

[41] Robinson, *Marked Men*, 109.
[42] Irving, *Cider House Rules*, 411.
[43] Ibid, 56.
[44] Ibid, 24.
[45] Robinson, *Marked Men*, 107.

middle-class men as victims diverts "attention away from male bodies as phallic weapons."[46] However, the power hierarchy in *Cider House* works in a more complicated way. The novel certainly diverts attention away from white middle-class fathers' bodies as phallic weapons by queering their fatherly affection and illuminating their victimhood, but the novel does highlight working-class and African American fathers' bodies as phallic weapons.

In *Cider House,* Homer and Larch's exceptional familial sympathy is counterpoised with white working-class and African American fathers' domestic violence. *Cider House* presents white middle-class men as obliged to protect helpless women from working-class and African American fathers' violence. As I argued in the previous chapter, Robert B. Parker's Spenser novels underscore a white middle-class detective's fatherly sympathy by contrasting it to working-class and African American men as non-family men. Similarly, these two white middle-class fathers, Larch and Homer, figure as pro-family and pro-choice because of working-class and African American men's stereotypical failure as fathers. Homer for the first time in his life learns about racial and working-class others when he goes to Ocean View. There, Homer encounters three working-class and African American men who abuse women physically and psychologically. First is Herb Fowler, one of the full-time workers at Ocean View who has a strange habit of throwing an unused condom to whoever mentions anything about sex. His favorite phrase is "See these? They keep a fella free."[47] However, he is far from a missionary of family planning in spite of saying that "[wouldn't] be so many orphans if more people put these on their joints."[48] Homer later finds out that Herb makes "a deliberate sort of hole, perfectly placed, dead center" on all the prophylactics he throws (Wally and Candy's unexpected

[46] Ibid, 107-108.
[47] Irving, *Cider House Rules*, 152.
[48] Ibid, 238.

pregnancy seems to be caused by one of these).[49] Herb turns out to be a vicious man who takes secret pleasure in creating family trouble. He is a nightmarish character because his action leads to unwanted fetus/babies in the name of men's freedom; the defective condoms he throws cancel women's reproductive choice.

Similarly, Herb's colleague Vernon Lynch creates a different type of family trouble. He regularly inflicts violence on his wife Grace; her body is full of bruises, and she never smiles in front of people. She has gone to St. Cloud's to get an abortion. She cannot tell this fact to Vernon and he hits her more because she spent the night away. Unlike Larch and Homer, Vernon is unlikely to support women's right to abortion. The novel represents white working-class fathers as reactionary against feminism. Drawing on melodrama's Manichean conflict between virtue and vice, Herb and Vernon's failure as working-class fathers is contrasted with Larch and Homer's altruistic middle-class fatherhood. Working-class fathers' "family-unfriendly" viciousness and their lack of sympathy for women are naturalized in this novel. Thus, working-class fathers are stereotyped as being violent against women, and in turn, the novel suggests that Larch and Homer's exceptional sympathy with women comes from their middle-class status.

However, the viciousness of working-class fathers is not enough to convince Homer to perform abortions. It is an African American father's otherness that finally turns him into a pro-choice supporter and has him reconcile with his surrogate father. While *Cider House* underscores Larch's nurturing of human capital in reproducing a pro-choice doctor, the African American family in this novel is characterized by the absence of such human capital. When Angel turns fifteen, he falls in love with Rose Rose, a mysterious African American single mother who is

[49] Ibid, 293.

only a few years older than he: "she was so young that her maternity was startling."[50] Rose Rose's father is Mr. Rose, the leader of African American migrant workers who travel around to pick fruit. If Larch's law is the sole law in St. Cloud's, the "*real* cider house rules were Mr. Rose's."[51] In spite of the written cider house rules (like, "Please don't operate the grinder or the press if you've been drinking") which are posted by Wally's mother and Homer every year before migrants come to Ocean View, it is Mr. Rose's unwritten law that controls black migrant workers.

Mr. Rose can keep his law because he is in the "knife business," not the "apple business."[52] The migrant workers obey his orders because he is a master of the knife: although he rarely resorts to violence, Mr. Rose intricately threatens his workers. All white people in Ocean View, including Homer and Wally and Candy, know this; but they overlook "a little gangland style" about him, saying that they do not "really want to know how he gets all those pickers to behave themselves."[53] However, they cannot help intervening in a black family's private problem, as white Americans have always done throughout the history of the United States: they find out that Rose Rose is abused by Mr. Rose. Rose Rose is pregnant again when her baby barely starts teething because she is raped by her father. Homer finds this out when he receives the notice that Larch has passed away and St. Cloud's needs Homer to replace him. Finally, Homer decides to perform an abortion for Rose Rose. Her abortion is successful, but the story has a gory ending; Rose Rose, who has excellent knife skills thanks to her father's teaching —just as Dr. Larch teaches Homer how to use a surgical knife—kills him and leaves Ocean

[50] Ibid, 496.
[51] Ibid, 362.
[52] Ibid, 311.
[53] Ibid, 431.

View in spite of Angel's invitation to live with his family. As such, while *Cider House* censures the authority of and the rules laid down by an African American father who is in the "knife business," it is uncritical about the authority of and the rules laid down by white middle-class fathers who are in a different type of the "knife business": the novel unveils the violence of an African American father while it covers the benevolent violence of white middle-class fathers.[54]

While *Cider House* delineates working-class and African American fathers as brutal bodies which cause unwanted pregnancies, Larch and Homer are disembodied subjects whose sympathy and emotion for powerless women are highlighted. In other words, whereas working-class and African American fathers in *Cider House* are characterized by their hyper-masculinity, white middle-class fathers are represented as "queer" subjects who appropriate the feminine virtue of sympathy. Larch and Homer's identity as white middle-class fathers hinges on two types of different bodies without agency: working-class and African American fathers' ferocious bodies and women's vulnerable bodies. White middle-class fathers in *Cider House* do feel anxious about the vulnerability of their bodies, but they overcome such bodily anxiety by having the surgical knife in their hands and controlling the bodies of others. Only Larch and Homer can make a reproductive and moral choice in *Cider House* because they do not have racialized and gendered bodies—their morality must be disembodied—which (re)produce the melodrama of the rapists and raped. As such, *Cider House* reinforces the illusion of neoliberalism: moral choice can be made by only individuals (i.e. white middle-class men) who step away from group politics.[55]

---

[54] See Booth, "*Neo-Victorian Self-Help*, or Cider House Rules," 300.

[55] Robinson states that Irving "eschews the collective in favor of the individual, the political in favor of the personal." Sally Robinson, "Men's Liberation, Men's Wounds: Emotion, Sexaulity, and the Reconstruction of Masculinity in the 1970s." eds. Milette Shamir and Jennifer Travis, *Boys Don't Cry? Rethinking Narratives of Masculinity and Emotion in the U.S.* (New York:

The novel's use of the racial stereotype of black men as rapists draws an invisible, but certainly tangible line between an individual unmarked by his race and a racial group characterized by their crimes. Homer firstly imagines himself as an outsider in the same sense as African Americans are; he is another "white Negro" whose victimhood is provided by his racial identification with African Americans.[56] Homer looks forward to seeing black migrant workers when he comes to Ocean View; he is excited because he secretly imagines the similarity between himself and family-less workers: "He was eager for the harvest to start; he was curious about meeting the migrants, about seeing the Negroes. He didn't know why. Were they like orphans? Did they not quite belong?"[57] Furthermore, when Homer sees a movie for the first time, he sympathizes with a side character: "black Bedouin" who has no home.[58] However, the novel finally draws a borderline between a right kind of outsider—a white middle-class individual—and a wrong one—an African American who is almost primitive and inhuman.

Irving's representation of an aberrant black family marks the post-nuclear family as white middle-class. Mr. Rose's black family and the alternative families in St. Cloud's and Ocean View are both far different from the norm of the nuclear family. Nevertheless, *Cider House* shows the former as aberrant and the latter as ideal. In short, Irving's version of the "flexible" post-nuclear family needs not only the non-flexible nuclear family but the "abnormal" African American family as its counterpoint. The absence of love in African American family is a nightmarish image of the family gone awry when it is liberated from the norm of the nuclear

---

Columbia UP, 2002), 219. See also Robinson, *Marked Men*, 101-113.

[56] For the discussion of the cultural significance of Norman Mailer's essay "White Negro," see Savran, *Taking It Like a Man*, 49-52.

[57] Irving, *Cider House Rules*, 288-289.

[58] Ibid, 251.

family. The extended/non-nuclear family is not new in the history of working-class and African American families; deprived of an economic privilege of having a male breadwinner and a female caretaker, they had a long history of having flexible gender roles.[59] However, novels like *Cider House* implicitly depict the flexible white middle-class families as something new and innovative: it does this by reproducing the stereotype of working-class and African American families and characterizing them as primitive rather than post-nuclear. Thus, the ideology of the post-nuclear family goes hand in hand with the ghost of the ideology of the nuclear family; the post-nuclear family is indeed flexible, but it also excludes the African American family as its "other," just like the discourse of the nuclear family did. Neoliberal ideology of the post-nuclear family looks liberating, but it actually reinforces the racial and class boundary.

In short, St. Cloud's is a utopia for white middle-class men because it is a mono-racial world in which white middle-class men's choice and rules are naturalized; whereas, Ocean View is dominated by an African American father's private law.[60] The story mostly focuses on Dr. Larch's benevolent nurturing of orphans "as if they came from royal families" rather than serious and dismal matters of life and death in St. Cloud's. As the narrator puts it, "Dr. Larch's benediction was uplifting, full of hope. These Princes of Maine, these Kings of New England, these orphans of St. Cloud's—whoever they were, they *were* the heroes of their own lives. . . . that much Dr. Larch, like a father, gave [Homer]."[61] As such, the narrator and Dr. Larch optimistically turn St. Cloud's into a utopian world in which everything is properly managed and

[59] For the history of African American families, see ed. Harriette Pipes McAdoo, *Black Families* (New York: Sage Publications, 2007) and Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work and The Family, From Slavery to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 1985) for instance.
[60] See Troy, Kella and Wahlström, *Making Home*, 137.
[61] Irving, *Cider House Rules*, 80.

governed by a white middle-class father/doctor. As Troy, Kella and Wahlström suggest, the making of a utopian orphanage in *Cider House* goes hand in hand with the reevaluation of group homes for children in the 1980s; Newt Gingrich and Charles Murray supported the neoliberal politics of using orphanages "to solve the social problem of 'illegitimacy' and 'welfare mothers.'"[62] In light of this, Larch is a benevolent father who saves helpless children from the abuse of irresponsible mothers.

Helpless Women and the Making of the Motherless World

Women in *Cider House* are generally represented as "absolutely helpless" victims who do not have subjectivity. As Wahlström puts it, in this novel "women are predominantly patients at the mercy of male physicians."[63] For example, young Homer Wells observes the women who deliver babies in St. Cloud's to leave them there for adoption:

> The women who boarded the coach did not look back, or even at each other. They didn't even speak. . . . The coach simply turned around and glided across the snow to the station; in the lit windows, Homer Wells could see that several of the women had their faces in their hands, or sat as stonily as the other kind of mourner at a funeral—the one who must assume an attitude of total disinterest or else risk total loss of control. . . . Importantly, Homer knew they did not look delivered of *all* their problems when they

[62] Troy, Kella and Wahlström, *Making Home*, 129.
[63] Wahlström, "Reproduction, Politics, and John Irving's *The Cider House Rules*: Women's Rights or 'Fetal Rights'?," 257. See also Bruce Rockwood, "Abortion Stories; Uncivil Discourse and 'Cider House Rules,'" Eds. Todd F. Davis and Kenneth Womack, *The Critical Response to John Irving* (London: Praeger, 2004), 129-130.

> left. No one he had seen looked more miserable than those women; he suspected it was no accident that they left in darkness.[64]

These women, who come to St. Cloud's to give up their babies, are represented as miserable but nameless others whom the male protagonists cannot fully understand and with whom they cannot communicate. As a result, readers cannot understand their personal backgrounds: why they come to St. Cloud's and why they need to give up their babies. Leslie Reagan discusses the many reasons that women chose abortion before *Roe vs. Wade*: economic difficulty, social stigma of single motherhood, age, enforcement of choice by their parents, husbands, and partners, and sexual exploitation to name a few.[65] Irving does not shed light on such different types of reality that American women have historically faced; he does not elaborate on the complexity of these women, which is hard to understand given the novel's central theme of abortion. According to Reagan, "[abortion before *Roe vs. Wade*] was widely practiced, openly discussed, and accepted by many people, but only within small groups . . . . Instead of acknowledging the prevalence of abortion, the public overlooked it and treated it . . . as 'an open secret.'"[66] *Cider House* turns the nuanced history of abortion into a melodrama between benevolent male doctors and helpless women. It was not unusual for male doctors to have contact and negotiation with their female patients; nor was abortion completely illegal even before *Roe vs. Wade* because there was the

---

[64] Irving, *Cider House Rules*, 30. This is Homer's first impression about the women who visit St. Cloud's to get abortion, but it does not change until the end of the novel: see ibid, 528 for the similar kind of description of these women.
[65] Leslie J. Reagan, *When Abortion Was a Crime: Women, Medicine, and Law in the United States, 1867-1973* (Berkeley: UP of California, 1997), 19-45.
[66] Ibid, 45.

legal loophole of therapeutic abortions.[67] However, *Cider House* rarely suggests the possibility of an interaction between male doctors and pregnant women.[68]

By putting too much emphasis on men's sexual violence as the primary reason of women having abortions, Irving further underestimates women's agency; it is as if women are allowed to have reproductive freedom as long as they are helpless victims of sexual violence. In general, Irving simplifies the reasons women need abortion. For example, when Dr. Larch (and later, Homer) performs an abortion for the first time, the patient is pregnant because she is raped by her father. Indeed, an abortionist called "Mrs. Santa Claus" tells him that about a third of the young women who get abortions are raped by their fathers and brothers.[69] In this way, *Cider House* sensationally emphasizes the danger of sexual violence and incest as Irving does in his other novels; in his novels, men are generally represented as violent to women and it is this very violence that his male heroes are typically trying to save women from.[70] This is very symptomatic for the history of abortion in the United States because, as Saletan discusses, in early 1990s a part of liberals and conservatives agreed to abortion "as an option for rape victims but not for other women . . . They framed the issue in terms of crime instead of gender equality, rallying support for rape victims rather than for women in general."[71] Pro-choice feminists believed that reproductive "rights" should be given to every woman regardless of her race, class, marital status, and experience of sexual violence.[72] Nevertheless, for pro-choice feminists, the plight of rape victims is a too "easy way to score points against pro-lifers" not to rely on.[73] The

---

[67] Ibid, 61-70.
[68] Ibid, 46-79.
[69] Irving, *Cider House Rules*, 66.
[70] For example, see Irving, *The World According to Garp* and *The Hotel New Hampshire.*
[71] Saletan, *Bearing Right*, 6.
[72] Saletan, *Bearing Right*, 158-187. See also Solinger, *Pregnancy and Power*, 207.
[73] Saletan, *Bearing Right*, 158.

image of women in search of abortion owing to sexual violence is indeed powerful and effective in justifying the necessity of abortion, but the melodramatic victimization of women both in reality and representation deprives them of agency and clouds the more complicated reasons why they may actually choose abortions.

By simplifying the complex and nuanced history of abortion, *Cider House* makes female anxiety concerning motherhood before *Roe vs. Wade* invisible. In light of this, the setup of the historical origin of the orphanage in this novel is remarkable; *Cider House* underlines the absence of mothers in St. Cloud's. According to the narrator, St. Cloud's—a fictional town located in the mountain side of Maine—had grown with the saw mill industry for the most of the nineteenth century. However, at the turn of the twentieth century most of the saw mill factories were closed, and most people migrated to downstream towns except "the older, and the less attractive prostitutes and the children of these prostitutes."[74] Then, one of these prostitutes writes a letter to "WHICHEVER OFFICIAL OF THE STATE OF MAINE WHO IS CONCERNED WITH ORPHANS" and proposes to make an orphanage in St. Cloud's which "HAS BEEN DESERTED BY ITS GODDAMN MEN (WHO WERE NEVER MUCH) AND LEFT TO HELPLESS WOMEN AND ORPHANS."[75] Thus, according to the novel, an orphanage is needed in St. Cloud's because it is a town of abandoned, "helpless" prostitutes and orphans; mothers, who are contrasted with prostitutes by the ideology of the Victorian family, are rarely visible in this town. The stereotypical connection between prostitutes and unwanted babies is further enforced when Mrs. Eames, a prostitute young Dr. Larch once sleeps with, and her

[74] *Cider House*, 19.
[75] Ibid, 19.

daughter—also a prostitute—visit his clinic in South Boston to get an abortion. Mrs. Eames dies of scurvy caused by the abortifacient drug named "FRENCH LUNAR SOLUTION" which promises to "restore female monthly regularity and stop suppression."[76] Immediately after her death, her daughter too passes away when her abortion in an underground clinic run by the abortionist Santa Claus—an ironic name for a person who terminates a baby/fetus' life—ends in failure because of her unsanitary facilities and backward methods of abortion surgery. Dr. Larch lives in a motherless world in which women are raped, prostitutes have unwanted pregnancies, and illegal abortion businesses kill these women. This is why he creates a utopian world of his own when he becomes an independent doctor. Indeed, the daughter of Mrs. Eames is also severely beaten about the face and neck in St. Claus' clinic probably because she cannot pay the abortion fee.[77]

The novel's exclusion of mothers can be also confirmed by its representation of two central female characters: Melony and Candy. Melony's distrust of maternal love resonates with the novel's obliteration of motherhood. Melony does not believe in love. She is the oldest girl in St. Cloud's; she has a relationship with Homer and makes him promise that he would stay in St. Cloud's with her forever. Nevertheless, she says to Homer: "we've got *nobody*. If you tell me we've got each other, I'll kill you. . . . If you tell me we've got your favorite Doctor Larch, or this whole place . . . I'll torture you before I kill you."[78] Melony is not loved by Dr. Larch as Homer is, and she does not have anybody to depend on except Homer who leaves St. Cloud's. Melony has no home, and the nurse's maternal love cannot save her, either. She even literally

[76] Ibid, 57.
[77] Ibid, 60.
[78] Ibid, 104.

destroys a house in anger when she learns that Dr. Larch did not keep the record about her parentage, which she wants to acquire in order to kill her birth mother.[79] Also, Candy's maternal love for Angel is not fully represented in this novel because she needs to conceal the fact that she is his biological mother. Right after Angel is born, Candy learns that Wally is alive in Burma and from then until the very end of the novel she conceals the fact of Angel's parentage. Candy can behave as a surrogate mother—just as Wally can behave as Angel's surrogate father—but she has to repress her maternal feelings; *Cider House*'s melodrama stems from the paternal, not the maternal. Melony and Candy exercise an exceptional amount of agency in comparison with other female characters in *Cider House*, but such exceptions reinforce the basics of the novel: women can be represented as long as they do not obstruct white middle-class men's power over others and their fathery love for their sons.

Cider House illustrates the neoliberal world in which the law becomes dysfunctional. In the vacuum of the law, it distinguishes illegitimacy from illegality. *Cider House* suggests that one's race, ethnicity and gender mark the borderline between what is legitimate and illegitimate; even if both Larch and foreign-born female abortionists are on the wrong side of the law, Larch's criminality is benevolent, even salvific. Thus, Irving sensationally portrays the vice of the underworld business of foreign-born abortionists. In order to legitimize Larch's benevolent but illegal offer of abortion, *Cider House* needs to provide not only the detailed background of Larch as a fully trained and skillful doctor but also the stereotyped image of unskilled and malicious abortionists like Mrs. Santa Claus. The novel underscores the foreignness of her clinic; instead of the anesthetic, in her clinic the choir keeps singing *Lieder* in German to ease pain during abortion. Also, one of her Lithuanian patients does not understand any English and Larch has to

[79] Ibid, 103-106.

rely on body language to communicate with her and her family when he benevolently goes to Santa Claus' clinic to save the Lithuanian patient from having a dangerous abortion. Targeting contemporary readers, *Cider House* reinforces class, ethnic, and sexual borderlines in the age of neoliberalism; by stereotypically representing the vice of the reproductive business by female immigrants, Irving suggests who should "play God" when the law is absent.

In *Cider House,* authentic, enlightening knowledge about "science" belongs to white male doctors while female abortionists marked by their ethnicities are deemed to be ignorant and consigned to a dark past. Irving carefully uses scientific language in order to distinguish white middle-class medical experts and female immigrants who are pseudo-medical experts. *Cider House* is mostly based on the standpoint of white men (Dr. Larch and Homer) who display profound knowledge on abortion throughout the story. Moreover, the authenticity of their medical knowledge is endorsed by the narrator and/or the author. For example, Dr. Larch writes down the explanation of "D&C," which is the popular scientific method used for abortion:

> The VAGINAL area is prepared with ANTISEPTIC SOLUTION. . . . The UTERUS is examined to estimate its size. One hand is placed on the ABDOMINAL WALL; two or three fingers of the other hand are in the VAGINA. A VAGINAL SPECULUM, which looks like a duck's bill, is inserted in the VAGINA—through which the CERVIX is visible. . . . With a series of METAL DILATORS, the CERVIX is dilated to admit entrance of the OVUM FORCEPS. These are tongs with which the doctor grabs at what's inside the UTERUS. He pulls what he can out.[80]

This description itself gives Dr. Larch scientific authenticity (highlighted by the author's capitalization of medical terms), but the author further adds in "Author's Notes" which are

[80] Irving, *Cider House*, 119-120.

located at the end of the book: "This is the exact description of a D and C as viewed by Dr. Richard Selzer (Yale School of Medicine), a general surgeon and author (*Mortal Lessons: Notes on the Art of Surgery and Rituals of Surgery* are among his books). I'm grateful for his reading of the manuscript of this novel and his generous advice—especially his introducing me to Dr. Nuland, who was the overseer of all the medical aspects of this novel."[81] Irving's choice of creating a scientific sense of verisimilitude is noticeable especially because *Cider House* as a whole does not care so much about the reality (remember the scene of abortion in the clinic of Santa Claus).

The novel as a whole is endorsed by such scientific language; in the cloak of science, *Cider House* resuscitates the power hierarchy between legitimate white male doctors and illegitimate foreign-born female abortionists. Indeed, according to Irving, the episode about a pregnant Lithuanian immigrant woman came from his own grandfather Dr. Frederick C. Irving who graduated from Harvard Medical School in 1910. He "became chief staff of the Boston Lying-In Hospital (in which young Dr. Larch works before he goes to St. Cloud's) and was William Lambert Richardson Professor of Obstetrics of Harvard for a number of years."[82] Irving's explicit reliance on the discourse made by such actual white male doctors reproduces the power hierarchy between white male doctors and "foreign" female abortionists. It is well-known that white middle-class male regular doctors made use of the anti-abortion campaign to establish their professional power by distinguishing themselves from female abortionists.[83] The white middle-class doctors in *Cider House* are not anti-abortion, but they are still antagonistic to

---

[81] Ibid, 556.
[82] Ibid, 554.
[83] See Reagan, *When Abortion Was a Crime*, 80-112. See also Carole Joffe, *Doctors of Conscience: The Struggle to Provide Abortions before and after* Roe vs. Wade (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 27-52.

female abortionists and make a contrast between themselves and abortionists in order to strengthen their professional identity.

However, Irving's stereotypical representation of underground abortionists is a far cry from the reality of those who performed abortion before *Roe vs. Wade*. Rickie Solinger calls such representation the myth of the "Back Alley Butcher" which plays a central part in the discourse of the "pro-choice" and is "the most widely accepted justification for granting women reproductive choice."[84] By using the image of the Back Alley Butcher, *Cider House* categorizes people into good choosers and bad choosers: it suggests that only white men can be good choosers, because of their monopolization of scientific knowledge. Furthermore, Irving's reinforcement of the myth of the Back Alley Butcher obscures pregnant women's agency by emphasizing their victimhood. Solinger discusses: "even in the face of danger, unwillingly pregnant women were not always helpless, desperate victims in the pre-*Roe* era. . . . these abortion-seeking women could be simultaneously, or alternately, awash in terrified helplessness *and* terribly focused on finding a way out, determined not to be victims of sex, of their sexual partners, of their bodies, of the law."[85] In the late twentieth century, a part of "pro-choice" supporters including Irving justified abortion by stressing the danger of the underworld business of abortionists in sensational ways. As Reagan illustrates, in reality abortion before *Roe vs. Wade* was not as dangerous as the myth of the Back Alley Butcher suggests. It is difficult to guess how "abortionists" performed abortion in pre-*Roe vs. Wade* era because no record is left except when the patient died and the court investigated it; however, Reagan concludes that illegal abortion done by midwives was no more dangerous than legal one done by regular doctors; they practiced

[84] Solinger, *Beggars and Choosers*, 37.
[85] Ibid, 55.

abortion in similar, scientific ways.[86] Also, in spite of the Comstock Law's strict prohibition of abortion, many regular doctors as well as "abortionists" openly helped women have abortion. Some of these doctors performed abortions themselves, and others gave their patients names of "abortionists": regular doctors and "abortionists" were not as isolated as *Cider House* implicates. In this novel, "scientific men" mostly speak while women remain silent. As a result, Dr. Larch's claim that "[he] gives them what they want: an orphan or an abortion" sounds unconvincing. All in all, white middle-class men control women's bodies in this novel, even if that is based on their benevolence. Or, maybe, the novel seems to be benevolent because educated white men control bodies of ignorant, helpless women.

Conclusion

Irving's obliteration of women's agency in *Cider House* makes a good contrast with Margaret Atwood's feminist novel *The Handmaid's Tale*, which was published in the same year as *Cider House*. Borrowing from the framework of the slave narrative, *Handmaid's Tale* highlights women's limited but existing choice in a nightmarish world where motherhood is totally controlled by men and the state. In *Handmaid's Tale*, Gilead, the centralized state born of *coup d'etat,* deprives women of everything: their property, job, and most significantly, reproductive freedom. Because of the toxic pollution and sexually transmitted diseases, most women in Gilead are infertile; in *Handmaid's Tale*, a child is a very rare resource which only the privileged class can have.[87] Accordingly, under the 24-7 surveillance, Gilead controls women's

[86] Regan, *When Abortion Was a Crime*, 76-77. See also Solinger, *Beggars and Choosers,* 49-55.
[87] As such, *Handmaid's Tale* embodies what Laurent Berlant calls "fetal motherhood," by "collapsing the reproductive woman into the juridical and discursive primacy of the fetus." See Rebekah Sheldon, "Somantic Capitalism: Reproduction, Futurity, and Feminist Science Fiction." *Ada* 3, 2013.

reproduction very severely; abortion is the most serious crime in *Handmaid's Tale*, and the obstetricians who helped women have abortions before Gilead are all executed. Offred, the female protagonist of *Handmaid's Tale* who calls herself a "two-legged womb," seems to have no choice than regularly having sexual intercourse with the commander to deliver his babies.[88] Nevertheless, women in *Handmaid's Tale* do not give up their agency even if it is very limited. Women in this novel never cease to have communication with each other even if it is strictly prohibited; they create the "Underground Femaleroad" to escape from Gilead. As such, *Handmaid's Tale* underlines powerless (but not helpless) women's resistance to men's control of their bodies and the bonds between women.[89] In spite of Irving and Atwood's common focus on (the prohibition of) abortion, *Cider House* illustrates a utopian world in which white middle-class fathers/doctors benevolently control women's bodies while *Handmaid's Tale* envisions a dystopian world where women exert their own agencies no matter how they are limited. White middle-class nurturing fathers in *Cider House* reinforce their power by embodying feminist values of care and appropriating the women's position of victimhood.

Irving's embrace of white middle-class fathers' individual choice shows the anxiety against "society" in the age of neoliberalism. According to Larch, St. Cloud's has no "society" while Ocean View represents the society. White middle-class men in St. Cloud's are deemed to be race-blind individuals while African American men in Ocean View are thought to be less than individuals: they are a backward race marked by the absence of individualism. Larch urges Homer to see "society" before choosing either to perform abortion or not:

---

[88] Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (London: Vintage, 1985), 146.
[89] It is difficult to see *Handmaid's Tale* as a critical response to neoliberalism per se, but her following MadAddam trilogy clearly contests neoliberal utopianism. See Chris Vials, "Margaret Atwood's Dystopic Fiction and the Contradictions of Neoliberal Freedom." *Textual Practice* 29.2 (2015), 235-254.

> In other parts of the world . . . there is what the world calls 'society.' Here in St. Cloud's we have no society—there are not the choices, the better-than or worse-than comparisons that are nearly constant in any society. It is less complicated here, because the choices and comparisons are either obvious or nonexistent. But having so few options is what makes an orphan so desperate to encounter society—*any* society, the more complex with intrigue, the more gossip-ridden, the better.[90]

Written in 1985, *Cider House* seems to invoke Margaret Thatcher's famous neoliberal manifesto in 1987 that "there is no such thing as society [because] there are individual men and women and families." In a neoliberal world, any social hierarchy is overlooked. Similarly, "there is no such thing as society" in St. Cloud's—all the unnecessary laws are deregulated by Dr. Larch in St. Cloud's, and in spite of Larch's statement that "there is no choice" in St. Cloud's, white middle-class men's choice actually matters in such a free world. In other words, white middle-class men's choice about pregnant women is so naturalized in a utopian neoliberal world that it does not even look like a choice. In contrast, Ocean View is a so-called "society." According to Larch and Thatcher's standpoints, a "society" is where one's race is marked. African American men's law makes Ocean View into a complex and gossip-ridden "society" from which the most serious family trouble generates.

On the one hand, St. Cloud's illuminates the bright side of a neoliberal world where white middle-class men's decisions and freedom to choose are paramount, and they are freed from the convention of the public (and unwritten familial) law. On the other hand, Ocean View shows white middle-class men's collective anxiety about the abuse of freedom by women and non-

[90] Irving, *Cider House Rules*, 119.

white middle-class men in a neoliberal "society." Ocean View shows the perils of the neoliberal world of choice because it is dominated by African American's private law. *Cider House* is a story about these two different but interdependent worlds which are bridged by the novel's protagonist Homer Wells. It is a classic home-coming story: young Homer departs from his utopian home, sees and hears thing firsthand in a "society," and eventually returns to his home in disappointment. Enacting melodrama's polarization of good and evil, benevolence of the white-middle class nurturing fathers and viciousness of black and working-class fathers reinforce the borderline between good individuals and bad society.[91] African American workers in Ocean View are represented as a group which cannot resist the tyranny of Mr. Rose; only white middle-class individuals can insert the surgical knife of reform against the tumor of African American's racialized familial pathology and rescue women from the crisis of the family as such.

[91] In praise of Charles Dickens, Irving himself states that Dickens "believed in good and evil—he believed there were truly good people, and truly bad ones. He loved every genuine virtue, and every kindness; he detested the many forms of cruelty, and he heaped every imaginable scorn upon hypocrisy and selfishness." Irving does not use the word melodrama, but his advocacy of clear-cut conflict between good and evil in Dickens' fiction as well as his sentimentality can be understood as Irving's embrace of melodrama. John Irving, *Trying to Save Piggy Sneed* (London: Black Swan, 2011), 218.

Chapter 3—*Kramer vs. Kramer*:

Paternal Innocence in the Age of Neoliberalism

Ted Kramer is one of the most iconic nurturing fathers throughout the history of American culture. The film *Kramer vs. Kramer* (Benton, 1979) won five academy awards (Best Picture, Best Director, Best Adapted Screenplay, Best Actor, and Best Supporting Actress), and was the highest grossing movie of 1979. This film's success owes much to its timely representation of two controversial issues about transforming American families: the divorced family and custody rights. Indeed, in 1979, the divorce rate hit the highest throughout the history of the United States.[1] Who should take care of children after divorce? Contrary to the common belief that the mother should take care of children, the movie tells the audience that the father can and should nurture children. The commercial success of the movie suggests how the basic idea of the nurturing father was welcomed by American society, including some feminists. Indeed, it was none other than Betty Friedan who called the movie "a feminist triumph."[2]

Friedan's positive remarks notwithstanding, *Kramer vs. Kramer* achieves the feminist goal of shared reproductive labor by stigmatizing a career woman: it is a new type of family melodrama which illustrates a white middle-class nurturing father as a victim whose inner morality is misrecognized by others. *Kramer vs. Kramer* relies on the convention of melodrama as a narrative modality which centers on the Manichean conflict between virtue and vice. In the demise of the welfare state, the protagonist Ted Kramer epitomizes the neoliberal subject who heroically juggles work and family as a new kind of entrepreneur persecuted by society because

[1] Saul D. Hoffman and Susan L. Averett, *Women and the Economy: Family, Work and Pay* (New York: Palgrave, 2016), 84.
[2] Betty Friedan, *The Second Stage: With a New Introduction.* (New York: Harvard UP, 1998), 122.

his lifestyle is too novel. In contrast, *Kramer vs. Kramer* singles out Ted's ex-wife Joanna as the villain who, with the help of the child custody law which champions mothers against fathers, snatches the son from the innocent father. Ted is portrayed as an individual who wages a lone fight against gender-biased society and law; he casts doubt on the naturalized bond between mothers and children. *Kramer vs. Kramer* suggests that the outdated law gives an unreasonable entitlement to mothers because they are treated as a gendered group rather than as individuals. As in the case of *The Cider House Rules* and other works I examine in this dissertation, the white middle-class father in *Kramer vs. Kramer* insists that the law should not intervene in family's private issues and, implicitly, that the father should be in charge.

Elaborating on Ted Kramer's suffering as an entrepreneur, *Kramer vs. Kramer* also portrays a white middle-class man as victimized outside his home. In a typically neoliberal logic, the film marks an entrepreneur as a victim; Ted is represented as a rebel, defying the corporation that dismisses the significance of human capital.[3] A nurturing father and an entrepreneur are two different but complementary types of the neoliberal subject that similarly criticizes how his new lifestyle is persecuted by an anachronistic society.

Like *Early Autumn* and *Cider House Rules, Kramer vs. Kramer* questions who can and should make choices in a neoliberal world. The movie demonstrates a white middle-class father as making right choices while it relies on the stereotyped representation of a single mother's bad choices: the single father's choice is right because he makes an individual choice to become an entrepreneurial and neoliberal subject, while the single mother's choice is wrong because she relies on the protection of the law which defines her as a member of a gendered group. Evoking

[3] As for neoliberalism's marking of white middle-class male entrepreneurs as victims, Sean Trundle, "Hope and Anxiety on the Endless Frontier: Scientists, State Policy and the Popular Imagination since 1945." PhD diss., University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, 2013, 168-217.

the resentment of white middle-class men about their victimization by the gendered entitlement given to mothers, the movie reinforces the stereotype that men can govern themselves while women cannot. However, in spite of white middle-class men's fear that the law and women might intervene in their private choices, in the real world it is women's privacy that is constantly scrutinized by the law, be it about abortion, divorce, or welfare. By ignoring such gender/sexual expectation that the law constantly imprints on women's body, the movie represents white middle-class men as victims of the relics of a sexist law.

In *Kramer vs. Kramer*, Ted achieves the recognition of his virtue through "a dialectic of pathos and action." This film systematically evokes the audience's pathos: Ted might lose his son Billy because he is constantly threatened by the ghost of motherhood. This sense of pathos is brought forward by the film's romanticization of Ted and Billy's quotidian daily life, which Ted's friend Margaret calls "beautiful." As film critic Stella Bruzzi discusses, *Kramer vs. Kramer* "elevates and sanctifies the routine, mundane acts associated with traditional motherhood."[4] Such a sanctified image of a father and son looks all the more pathetic and beautiful because Joanna's sinister appearance alerts the audience to how the bond between a father and a son is temporary and thus fragile; as Linda Williams suggests, the feeling of loss is central to melodramatic pathos.[5] As such, the domestic routine, which imprisons and suffocates the heroine of the 1950s' family melodrama (e.g. *All That Heaven Allows*), is turned into a pathetic source of power for Ted—something that has to be preserved at any cost—in *Kramer vs. Kramer*.

[4] Stella Bruzzi, *Bringing up Daddy: Fatherhood and Masculinity in Post-war Hollywood* (London: British Film Institute, 2005), 110.
[5] Linda Williams, "Melodrama Revisited," ed. Nick Browne, *Refiguring American Film Genres: History and Theory* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1998), 70.

Furthermore, the pathos of a nurturing father is intensified by the stark contrast between the silent tableau of a father and a son and the deceptive language in the courtroom which favors a mother. As Jonna Eagle argues drawing on Lauren Berlant's national sentimentality project, melodrama's marking of muteness as a sign of moral goodness addresses how "truth itself is the product of a gut knowing rather than, say, the outcome of rational argument or deliberation."[6] The ideology of neoliberalism turns the law into an unreasonable defense of vested interests which destroys the "true feeling" embodied by a father and a son. As the popular term "silent majority" suggests, the backlash movement against multiculturalism in the late twentieth century assumes that white middle-class men's suffering stems from their quiet virtue of taking it like a man. In *Kramer vs. Kramer*, the audience understands how Ted and Billy's "beautiful" bond—embodied in their embrace—is marred by the lawyers' and Joanna's deceitful words in the courtroom, while Ted and Billy's daily routine is often depicted without any words.[7] In this sense, the film is an effective medium for showing the superiority of the embodied image over words. If melodrama's basic function is "to put forth a moral truth in gesture and to picture what could not be fully spoken in words," as Williams puts it, *Kramer vs. Kramer*'s distrust in words shows how melodrama as a mode is appropriated to invoke neoliberal resentment against the law.[8]

The serenity of Ted's domestic life is also in constant tension with the hectic rhythm of his business. The melodramatic pathos of the movie is provided by the constant sense of threat that

---

[6] Jonna Eagle, *Imperial Affects: Sensational Melodrama and the Attractions of American Cinema* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP), 11.
[7] Bruzzi, *Bringing up Daddy*, 111.
[8] Williams, "Melodrama Revisited," 52. See also Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1976), 56-80 for the analysis of melodrama's muteness.

the paternal bond is assaulted by not only the law and the mother but by corporate capitalism. Ted and Billy's pathetic daily routine does not exist in the movie as a given; it can be represented as such only after Ted successfully resolves his conflict between work and family. However, this is not to say that Ted becomes a better father by quitting his work. Ted becomes a nurturing father when he turns the relationship between the capital and labor upside down; while Ted is totally controlled by his boss at the beginning of the movie, Ted controls his work after he commits himself to nurturing Billy; as "an entrepreneur of himself," Ted chooses a job that allows him to juggle work and family.[9]

In *Kramer vs. Kramer*, a nurturing father's new gender roles come with the arrival of new economy. The film offers a new type of the thrilling "action" scene in which an entrepreneurial white middle-class man displays and sells his human capital to find a job within a day. As Eagle explains in her discussion of Western movies as melodrama, "pathetic identification with the hero frames the pleasures of action as morally legitimate, while an insistence on the hero as the agent of such action mediates the feminizing implications that pathetic identification might otherwise entail": while the film's domestic scenes evoke the pathos and allocate femininity to a white middle-class man, he retrieves and remakes his masculinity in such visceral spectacles of action.[10]

In light of this, it is no coincidence that the viewer can find no character of color in *Kramer vs. Kramer* except a few extras in the background. As film critic Stanley Corkin illuminates, the Manhattan represented in *Kramer vs. Kramer* is a "gentrified space" predominantly occupied by bourgeois; ethnic and racial diversity which once functioned as a

---

[9] Michael Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the College de France 1978-1979,* ed. Michel Senellart, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2004), 226.
[10] Eagle, *Imperial Affects*, 91.

symbol of this metropolitan city is gone, and the film elaborates on the emerging yuppie lifestyle of a white middle-class creative worker.[11] Racial minorities are systematically excluded from the entrepreneurial space; a nurturing father's pathos is monopolized by white middle-class men. Given the crucial role women of color play in the real market of domestic labor, this is rather surprising; by transforming the significance of domestic labor, *Kramer vs. Kramer* normalizes the neoliberal subject who injects entrepreneurial spirit into his home.

The Victimization of the White Middle-class Nurturing Father

Kramer vs. Kramer turns a white middle-class father into a victim who desperately wages a moral war against women. While this movie represents Joanna as a deficient mother who first neglects her son and then takes him back on a whim, Ted is represented as a morally responsible father who happily shoulders the burden of childrearing in the absence of the mother. As many critics argue, in this movie Joanna is represented as a stereotypical career-oriented and narcissistic feminist construed in the 1980s backlash against the women's movement; as Joanna states in her letter to Billy, she "must find something interesting to do for [herself] in the world."[12] As its title suggests, *Kramer vs. Kramer* turns the family into a zero-sum game between parents; Ted loses the custody battle, but wins the sympathy of the audience.[13]

---

[11] Stanley Corkin, *Starring New York: Filming the Grime and the Glamour of the Long 1970s* (New York: Oxford UP, 2011), 162-193.

[12] See Bruzzi, *Bringing up Daddy*, 107-114; Corkin, *Starring New York,* 179-180; Rebecca A. Bailin, "*Kramer vs. Kramer* vs. Mother-right," *Off Our Backs* 10.3 (1980), 14-15; Ellen Seiter, "Men, Sex and Money in Recent Family Melodramas," *Journal of the University Film and Video Association* 35.1 (1983), 23-27; Roslyn Mass, "The Mirror Cracked: The Career Woman in a Trio of Lansing Films," *Film Criticism* 12.2 (Winter 1987/1988), 28-36. Imogen Tyler, "The Selfish Feminist: Public Images of Women's Liberation," *Australian Feminist Studies* 22.53 (2007), 173-190; Molly Haskell, "Lights…Camera…Daddy!," *The Nation* (May 28, 1983), 673-675.

[13] Bailin, "*Kramer vs. Kramer* vs. Mother-right," 15.

Kramer vs. Kramer registers a novel space of innocence for the American psyche, one with urban and paternal origins. The emotional power of *Kramer vs. Kramer* hinges on the dual use of innocence: a six-year-old boy's immaculate innocence and Ted's legal innocence in terms of the battle over the custody right.[14] This movie parts ways from a melodramatic convention because, as Williams discusses, melodrama tends to yearn for "rural and maternal origins."[15] While innocence is most conventionally associated with motherhood in the realm of the maternal melodrama, the movie dismantles such an association and replaces it with fatherhood: as one critic states, this movie is "a melodrama of maternal negligence."[16] *Kramer vs. Kramer* starts from the scene in which Joanna leaves her home. The movie's first cut is to a close-up of Joanna, who looks dazed. She twice tells Billy that she loves him, but her words sound hollow; displaying Joanna's dark face in profile and diverting her gaze from the camera, this scene impedes the audience's identification with Joanna and makes one feel that she is bothered by something else. Then, suddenly, she leaves Billy. Joanna's determined expression shows how maternal sympathy is lost at the very beginning of the movie. Joanna had continuously taken care of Billy for five years before her departure, but the movie does not illustrate such a familial history.[17]

In *Kramer vs. Kramer*, the space of innocence is offered by a specific image: Ted and Billy's domestic routine. Paradoxically, the more trivial and banal the routine is, the more

---

[14] Bailin, "*Kramer vs. Kramer* vs. Mother-right," 14.
[15] Williams, "Melodrama Revised," 65.
[16] Tyler, "The Selfish Feminist," 183. For melodrama's representation of motherhood and innocence, see Williams, "Melodrama Revised," 65-66; Christine Gledhill, "The Melodramatic Field: An Investigation," ed. Christine Gledhill, *Home is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film* (London: British Film Institute, 1987), 33-36; Ann Kaplan, M*otherhood and Representation: The Mother in Popular Culture and Melodrama* (New York: Routledge, 1992).
[17] Seiter, "Men, Sex and Money in Recent Family Melodramas," 26.

endearing and profound it looks; the movie's pathetic power hinges on its representation of a nurturing father's life as quotidian and mundane. One example of such a scene is Ted and Billy's making of French toast. The movie uses the contrast between two French toast scenes in the early and late part of the movie to underscore Ted's "before and after" as a nurturing father. On the first morning after Joanna leaves their home, Ted tries to make French toast with Billy and messes everything up. While the "after" French toast scene at the end of the movie looks very ordinary, the "before" French toast scene at the beginning of the movie underlines its extraordinariness. Ted's upset is emphasized by the camera's incessant move from one object to another. This sequence uses nearly 70 shots, during which Ted unstably keeps moving in confusion; the disjointed nature of the editing addresses Ted's inability to play a nurturing role in his home. The fragmental sequence hampers the viewer's melodramatic identification with the protagonist; the audience feels no sense of peace during the "before" scene.

In contrast, the "after" scene creates the sense of order and serenity which helps the viewer's melodramatic identification with the protagonist. In this scene, Ted and Billy know exactly what they should do, and they don't speak a word until they finish cooking. Their efficiency makes the audience assume that it is one of their daily routines to work in such harmony. The camera barely moves while they are making the French toast; taken in one long take, the scene gives the audience a sense of stability, integrity, and calmness, which epitomizes the solid emotional bond between Ted and Billy. Underscoring Ted's affective virtue of sympathizing with the helpless victim, this scene's seamless composition solicits the viewer's vicarious identification with the pathetic subject who endures the pain of suffering; while Ted makes his child suffer in the "before" scene, Ted suffers with Billy in the "after" scene.

In the age of neoliberalism, *Kramer vs. Kramer* turns the mundane act of making the French toast into a white middle-class father's lifestyle "choice." It is not deemed as a choice when a mother cooks, but it is turned into an admirable and picturesque scene when it is done by a father. As Arlie Hochschild's study *The Second Shift* shows, in the late twentieth century most women take much more responsibility in housekeeping than men even if both of them work outside home.[18] Nevertheless, a white middle-class father is construed as a risk-taking individual when he juggles work and family: he dares to make such a choice, while for most of women it is not a choice but a given, nature. Ted can "have it all" while Joanna cannot: throughout the movie, Ted's juggling of work and family is represented as a good lifestyle choice while Joanna's choice of being a career woman is construed as unnatural. As Rebecca A. Bailin argues, in *Kramer vs. Kramer* "[the] father's absence from his child is seen . . . as redeemed, the mother's absence from the child unredeemable."[19] While addressing Ted's moral repentance and melodramatic redemption, the movie represents Joanna's desertion from home as the unredeemable sin, which works as a permanent marker of her guilt.[20]

In short, drawing on the moral lexicon of melodrama, *Kramer vs. Kramer* enacts the neoliberal idea of a gendered choice. On the one hand, men can choose whether or not to devote themselves to domestic jobs; Ted's sympathy with his child is the marker of his morality. But for women, domestic work is an obligation rather than a choice, and when they stop accepting their maternal roles as a given, their morality is made to appear deficient. As such, *Kramer vs. Kramer*

---

[18] Arlie Hochschild and Anne Machung, *The Second Shift: Working Families and the Revolution at Home*. (New York: Penguin, 2012); Haskell, 675.
[19] Bailin, "*Kramer vs. Kramer* vs. Mother-right," 14.
[20] As for the affective role of redemption in melodrama, see Eagle, *Imperial Affects*, 126-130 and Reidar Due, *Love in Motion: Erotic Relationships in Film* (New York: Columbia UP, 2013), 9-12.

shows how not everybody has an equal choice in the market economy; if, as feminist critic Eva Chen discusses, "neoliberal choice refers to one's ability to choose maximum material gain and profit in order to construct one's own self, and agency now means the ability to be active in this materialistic, profitable self-actualising project," such a choice is not given to women in general and single mothers in particular.[21] Single mothers can be blamed for their excessive interest in their careers, while single fathers are rewarded.

The emotional climax of *Kramer vs. Kramer* comes when a white middle-class father's individual choice is threatened by a mother's legal entitlements. Set up on the very morning Joanna is supposed to take Billy from his home under the court order, the second French toast scene ends with "a paroxysm of pathos."[22] When they finish making the French toast, the camera cross-cuts between Ted and Billy's faces. Ted lifts Billy up in his arms; the camera shows Ted keeping his tears back, while Billy whimpers behind the camera. This scene solicits the viewers' tears; they can sense the feeling of loss throughout this scene. As Williams puts it, "[a] melodrama does not have to contain multiple scenes of pathetic death to function melodramatically. What counts is the feeling of loss suffused throughout the form. Audiences may weep or not weep, but the sense of a loss that implicates readers or audiences is central."[23] Ted's choice of making the French toast is infused with pathos because the audience knows how fragile such a beautiful tableau is; a nurturing father's choice looks pathetic and moral because it is constantly threatened by what Ted believes is gendered entitlement.

---

[21] Eva Chen, "Neoliberalism and Popular Women's Culture: Rethinking Choice, Freedom and Agency." *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 16.4 (2013), 443.
[22] Williams, "Melodrama Revised," 58.
[23] Ibid, 70.

Kramer vs. Kramer underlines Ted's manliness by culturally appropriating the feminine. Ted embodies all the signifiers—housekeeping work, discrimination at the workplace, melodramatic subject—which are conventionally associated with femininity. Paradoxically, such a cultural feminization makes a man out of Ted; as Bruzzi puts it, "[within] the framework of melodrama, Ted becomes the conventionally abandoned mother struggling to bring up the family alone, forfeiting a job in order to take care of his child and urgently needing to get a lesser job in order to support them both."[24] *Kramer vs. Kramer* appropriates feminist ideals for the male protagonist while denying them to the female antagonist: as I will discuss later, Ted appropriates femininity as a man's choice to nurture human capital.[25]

Ted's manliness is underscored by his incorporation of not only femininity but infantile citizenship. At the end of the second cooking scene, the camera screens Ted enduring his psychological pain while the audience hears Billy whimpering in Ted's arms.[26] Billy's tears underscore his lack of matured manliness, but at the same time they somehow echo with Ted's inner vulnerability: a big man but a child at heart. As Lauren Berlant states in her discussion of infantile citizenship, "[the] infantile citizen then enfigures the adult's true self, his inner child in all its undistorted or untraumatized possibility."[27] Ted's morality is marked by his pathetic identification with the helpless child; while the legal language distorts the quotidian reality of a

[24] Bruzzi, *Bringing up Daddy*, 110.
[25] Tyler, "The Selfish Feminist," 182; Seiter, "Men, Sex and Money in Recent Family Melodramas," 25; Bailin, "*Kramer vs. Kramer* vs. Mother-right,"14; and Robin Wood, *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan* (New York: Columbia UP, 1986), 172-173.
[26] I will discuss the significance of tableau in melodrama shortly.
[27] Lauren Berlant, "The Subject of True Feeling," eds. Austin Sarat and Thomas R. Kearns, *Cultural Pluralism, Identity Politics, and the Law* (Ann Arbor: UP of Michigan, 1999), 56.

father and a son (which will be discussed in the next section), Ted's embrace of an innocent child elucidates his "true self," which transcends the traumatizing law.

This is not to say, though, that the film's feminization and infantilization of a white middle-class father deprives him of masculinity; rather, Ted looks masculine because he endures the pain without whining. Highlighting Ted's ability to repress tears, the second French toast scene also recuperates his masculinity. To borrow from Tania Modleski's discussion on male weepies, Ted epitomizes a "strong, stoic type whose sorrow lurks under the surface but who is wept over by other characters and by the audience."[28] In short, Ted "takes it like a man." As literary critic David Savran discusses, the words "take it like a man" suggest that "masculinity is a function not of social or cultural mastery but of the act of being subjected, abused, even tortured."[29] This construction of masculinity through victimization is melodramatic because, as Elisabeth Anker discusses, "[in] melodrama's narrative temporality . . . sovereign freedom can only be achieved *after* an overwhelming experience of vulnerability, powerlessness, and pain."[30] In the age of neoliberalism, a white middle-class father's melodramatic virtue of perseverance becomes the marker of his self-governmentality and self-responsibility and reinforces his individualistic masculinity; neoliberal choice is given exclusively to risk-taking individuals, which are modeled on white middle-class men like Ted.

---

[28] Tania Modleski, "Clint Eastwood and Male Weepies," *American Literary History* 22.1 (2009), 136.
[29] David Savran, *Taking It Like A Man: White Masculinity, Masochism, and Contemporary American Culture* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1998), 38.
[30] Elisabeth R. Anker, *Orgies of Feeling: Melodrama and the Politics of Freedom* (Durham: Duke UP, 2014), 13.

Ted "takes it like a man"

The Distrust of Law and Language in the Age of Neoliberalism

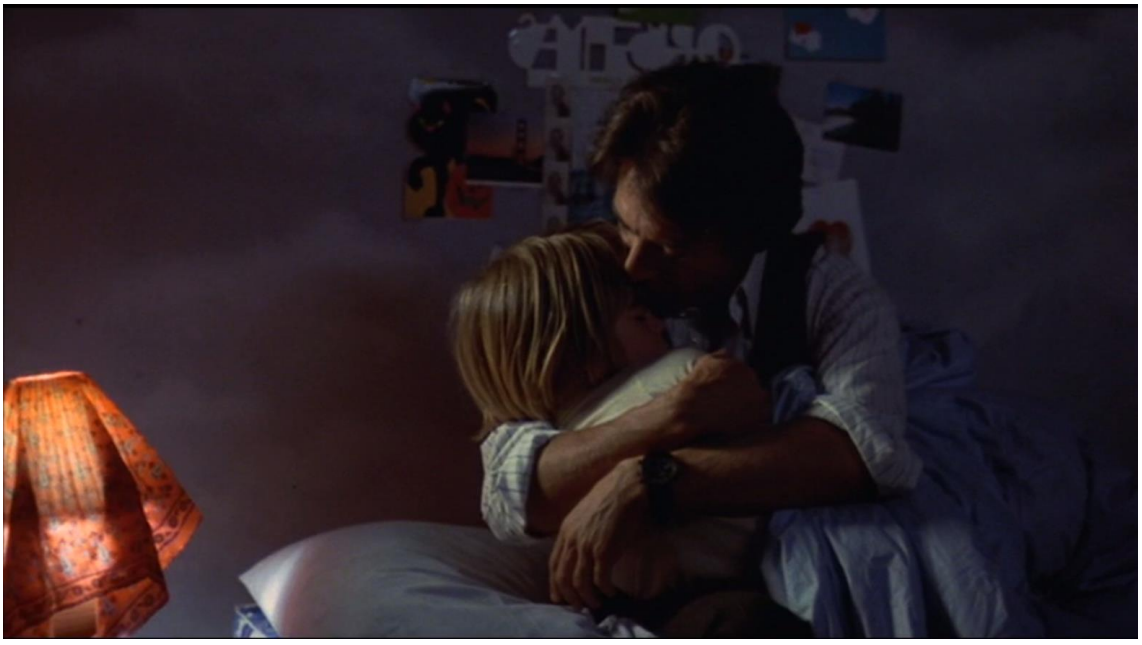
Kramer vs. Kramer represents legal language as the fallacious medium which misrepresents a father and a son's beautiful scene of sympathy. Ted and Billy do not say a word while making the French toast at the end of the movie; instead, their "frozen tableau," to borrow from Williams, tells what cannot be spoken in words.[31] Although Ted and Billy cannot put it into proper words—that is exactly why they are powerless victims—the picture suggests that they have the moral high ground, which is not fully understood by the judge and lawyers who use deceptive language in the courtroom.

As Berlant suggests, "this is an age of sentimental politics in which policy and law and public experiences of personhood in everyday life are conveyed through rhetorics of

[31] Williams, "Melodrama Revised," 52.

utopian/traumatized feeling."[32] Rational language matters less than feelings; indeed, one sequence clearly shows how Ted's inability to find a proper language to express his relationship with Billy makes him vulnerable and virtuous. On their first meeting, Ted's lawyer recommends him to make a pros and cons list about retaining Billy's custody. Ted immediately makes the list. The cons side has: "1. Money. 2. No privacy. 3. Work affected. 4. No social life. 5. No let up," while Ted cannot fill in the pros side. The camera captures the close-up of the list—full of cons and pros, blank—then, we cut to the image of Ted embracing Billy on his bed.[33] After a few seconds of silence, Ted sentimentally whispers: "I love you, Billy. I know you're sleeping and can't hear me. I love you with all my heart." In spite of Ted's silent whisper, the image is more eloquent and persuasive than words in this scene; Ted's affection for Billy is turned into a cliché when it is put into words, and Ted's emotion rather than his rational thinking has the power to move the audience.[34]

[32] Berlant, "The Subject of True Feeling," 57.
[33] The image of Ted holding Billy looks like the Pietà, Virgin Mary cradling the dead body of Jesus. Again, *Kramer vs. Kramer* appropriates prototype of femininity: a sacred mother's silent embrace.
[34] Bruzzi, *Bringing up Daddy*, 112.



Ted embraces Billy: the love between a father and a son cannot be articulated by language

Fatherly virtue in *Kramer vs. Kramer* does not stem from Ted's power to speak. In this sense, *Kramer vs. Kramer* distinguishes itself from other prototype single father movies like *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1962). In this movie, Atticus Finch is a single father who always cares about his children. Nevertheless, he is essentially different from Ted Kramer because his primary task is to metaphysically teach his children the significance of the outer-world (which is full of racial and class prejudice); having a black maid, he does not have to care about mundane drudgeries like Ted does. As Robert Griswold puts it, in the 1920s-1940s, "[father's] jobs were to foster creativity, individualism, and proper sex-role identification, not to do children's laundry, pick up their rooms, cook their food, nurse them, or chauffer them."[35] Indeed, "[a] repeated motif in *Mockingbird* is Atticus sitting down with Scout (as in the bedtime scene) to explain to her the adult world."[36] Being a lawyer, Atticus looks less a victim because he has the power to speak;

[35] Robert Griswold, *Fatherhood in America: A History* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 117.
[36] Bruzzi, *Bringing up Daddy*, 88.

To Kill a Mockingbird offers a traditionally patriarchal unity between the father, the law, and the language.

Kramer vs. Kramer's melodramatic distrust in legal words goes hand in hand with the neoliberal anxiety about the law's intervention into the private sphere.[37] Elaborating on the custody battle between Ted and Joanna, the movie criticizes how the law, supported by deceptive language, grants "innocence" to the wrong person. As Gledhill puts it, "the melodramatic plot turns on an initial, often deliberately engineered, misrecognition of the innocence of a central protagonist."[38] The law's distortion of the reality is first implied in the scene in which Ted meets his lawyer for the first time. With a smile on his face, Ted casually says to him: "I don't know the legal jargon for it, but I think it's 'desertion.' I don't mean to tell you your job, but I just think I have an open-and-shut case." However, Ted's smile disappears from his face when the lawyer gives him a surprising reply: "first of all, there's no such thing as open-and-shut case where custody is involved." While Ted finds it obvious that Joanna's decision to leave their home should be called "desertion," his lawyer does not believe so; with the camera's focus on Ted's face in astonishment, the dissonance between legal jargon and common sense shows how it makes a conflict with Ted's view of himself as a victim who should be vindicated. The complexity and manipulability of the law is in tension with the clear-cut, Manichean morality of melodrama.

Fleshing out the ugly details of the courtroom discussion, *Kramer vs. Kramer* dramatizes how the law viciously misrepresents Ted and Billy's "beautiful" domestic life. When somebody

---

[37] On the flip side, actual U.S. family law "grants individuals wide latitude to assert negative liberty—that is, freedom from state intervention—in family life." Anne L. Alstott, "Neoliberalism in U.S. Family Law: Negative Liberty and Laissez-faire Markets in the Minimal State." *Law and Contemporary Problems* 77.4 (2014), 25.

[38] Gledhill, "The Melodramatic Field," 30.

testifies about the reality of the Kramers' lives in his/her own words, the lawyers and the judge interrupt him/her and intentionally take his/her words amiss. Legal scholars Paul Bergman and Michael Asimow state: "An enduring image of *Kramer vs. Kramer* is that of two snarling attorneys trying to demolish the opposing parent while ignoring what's best for little Billy."[39] This is not to say that Ted is silent in the courtroom scenes; he does speak, but his language is totally misunderstood by the lawyers and the judge. Joanna is also misrepresented by the lawyers' words, but Ted is represented as the ultimate victim in the movie because the law eventually sides with Joanna.

The law's unreliability is most effectively dramatized when Margaret Phelps testifies in the courtroom. As a mutual friend of Ted and Joanna, Margaret is portrayed as the most objective person—the "true judge"—in this film.[40] She criticizes Ted for being a workaholic father when Joanna leaves her home. Yet, she slowly makes friends with him and starts to admire him as being a good nurturing father while Joanna is left friendless. Margaret being the most reliable witness, the lawyer and the judge's refusal to listen to her testimony disappoints not only Ted and Margaret but the audience of the movie. When Joanna's lawyer finishes his questions, Margaret starts to talk to Joanna personally from the witness stand. In a sentimental tone, Margaret tells Joanna that "they're beautiful together, just beautiful." However, at this very moment the loud sound of the gavel interrupts her emotional speech, and the judge tells her to step down. As film critic Steve Neale argues, in melodrama tears are induced by "discrepancies between the knowledge and point of view of the spectator and the knowledge and points of view

---

[39] Paul Bergman and Michael Asimow, *Reel Justice: The Courtroom Goes to Movies* (Kansas City: Andrews McMeel, 2006), 317. See also David Ray Papke, "Peace Between the Sexes: Law and Gender in *Kramer vs. Kramer*," 30 U.S.F.L. Rev. 1199 (1996), 1199-1208.
[40] Bailin, "*Kramer vs. Kramer* vs. Mother-right," 14.

of the characters, such that the spectator often *knows more*."[41] Margaret's point of view is closer to the viewer's, and she knows more than Joanna knows. So Margaret cries, "if you could see them together, maybe you wouldn't be here now"—all the while, Joanna averts her eyeline from the camera, suggesting how she is afraid to recognize Ted's virtue that Margaret and the audience recognize: as Neale states, "tears in melodrama come in part from some of the fundamental characteristics of its narratives and modes of narration. A particular place is constructed for the spectator, a place from which . . . we are led to wish 'if only.': if only this character realised the other's worth."[42] However, the sentimentality carried by Margaret's quavering voice is ruined—or underscored in contrast—by the gavel's impersonal noise. The movie shows how Ted and Billy's "beautiful" union is systematically misrepresented and interrupted by the law.

The Father's Rights Movement and *Kramer vs. Kramer*

Ted's neoliberal frustration about the law's intrusion into the private sphere is inseparably linked with his misogyny.[43] As legal scholar David Ray Papke discusses, "the gaze at legal process [in *Kramer vs. Kramer*] is almost always biased, and viewers are invited to adopt the male perspective."[44] Ted's question about the law's bias about the gender roles—"what law is it that says a woman is a better parent simply by the virtue of her sex?"—is not seriously examined

[41] Steve Neale, "Melodrama and Tears." *Screen* 27.6 (1986), 7.
[42] Ibid, 12.
[43] Tyler, "The Selfish Feminist," 184, Seiter, "Men, Sex, and Money in Recent Family Melodramas," 25, and Bailin, "*Kramer vs. Kramer* vs. Mother-right," 14.
[44] Papke, "Peace Between the Sexes: Law and Gender in *Kramer vs. Kramer*," 1204.

by the lawyer and the judge, while Joanna's words at the end of her speech—I'm his mother, I'm his mother—are taken seriously.

Legal critics have discussed how the courtroom scenes in *Kramer vs. Kramer* are far from realistic.[45] Aside from the lawyers' distortion of reality discussed above, there are two crucial differences between the movie and reality: the judge does not take Billy's opinion in consideration; and more importantly, the obsolete tender years doctrine replaces best interests of the child principle. Illustrating what people want to hear in the custody battle rather than how it actually proceeds, these differences are crucial in understanding the way neoliberalism evokes white middle-class men's anxiety around and frustration with the law.

The movie's implication that the tender years doctrine is still dominant in the courtroom highlights white middle-class men's neoliberal anxiety that the law intervenes into the private sphere and gives entitlement to mothers: as Anker puts it, "[neoliberal] melodramas might seem to link freedom to limited state power" even if they actually increase certain types of state power.[46] The tender years doctrine was prevalent in American custody battles since the nineteenth century. Based on the fixed gender roles allocated within the ideology of the nuclear family, this doctrine sees the mother as the natural caretaker of children when divorced. During

---

[45] See Haskell, "Lights…Camera…Daddy!," 674; Bergman and Asimow, *Reel Justice*; Papke; Jane E. Lytle-Vieira, "Kramer vs. Kramer Revisited: The Social Work Role in Child Custody Cases," *Social Work* (January-February 1987), 5; Georgia Dullea, "Child Custody: Jurists Weigh Film vs. Life," *The New York Times* (21 December, 1979), Andrew I. Shepherd, *Children, Courts, and Custody: Interdisciplinary Models for Divorcing Families* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2004), 8-26, and "Custody: Kramer vs. Reality in Divorce Cases, as in Society, Rules Are Changing," *Time* 115.5 (February 4th, 1980), 77.

[46] Anker, *Orgies of Feeling*, 9. Again, on the flip side, the law actually steps back from custody battles in most cases. Typically, the law leaves it to private negotiation between parents rather than making a judicial determination. See Harry D. Kruse and David D. Meyer, *Family Law in a Nutshell* (St. Paul: West, 2003), 184.

the 1970s, the tender years doctrine was replaced by best interests of the child in most states including New York. In contrast to the tender years doctrine, this principle dismisses the traditional gender roles and gives utmost priority to the best interests of the child.[47]

Nevertheless, the ghost of the tender years doctrine is still powerful in *Kramer vs. Kramer*. The movie underscores that Joanna obtains Billy's custody just because she is a mother. When the lawyer tells Ted what the judge's decision is, he says: "The judge went for motherhood right down the line." In this scene, the lawyer suggests that the tender years doctrine is still dominant in the courtroom even if it is nominally replaced by the best interests of the child. Similarly, Ted's argument in the courtroom ("what law is it that says a woman is a better parent simply by the virtue of her sex?") questions the naturalization of the maternal virtue. The movie most effectively evokes white middle-class men's anxiety about the law by suggesting that more "gender neutral" best interests of the child principle is watered down by the outdated doctrine of tender years. In other words, Ted and the lawyer complain how Joanna's virtue is gendered; in contrast, the movie represents Ted's melodramatic moral virtue as unmarked and individualized. *Kramer vs. Kramer* seems to be speaking for the feminist idea that parents can nurture children regardless of their gender; nevertheless, the movie re-asserts an updated patriarchalism because it mis-represents the law which no longer favored mothers but had already switched to the best interests of the child.

Similarly, the absence of Billy's standpoint in the courtroom scenes makes it doubtful whether the judge properly considers the "best interests of the child." In actual custody battles, the opinion of the children of the divorced couple is respected; sometimes the judge interviews

[47] Jocelyn Elise Crowley, *Defiant Dads: Fathers' Rights Activists in America* (New York: Cornell UP, 2008), 28-33.

them in the courtroom, and sometimes their opinion is stated via psychiatrists and/or social workers who represent their voice.[48] By bypassing such a procedure and focusing exclusively on the unproductive debate between the parents and the lawyers, *Kramer vs. Kramer* makes the audience believe that the best interests of the child are theoretical at best. In other words, the movie represents the law and women as unsympathetic to children and unable to vicariously think and make a choice from their viewpoints. The movie suggests that the law and women cannot feel for others while it evokes melodramatic sympathy for a white middle-class father.

The emergent father's rights movement in the late 1970s shares the sentiment with *Kramer vs. Kramer*. One member of a father's rights group states: "the state is excessively feminized because the rules of the custody game are explicitly designed to favor women and have no relation to children's needs."[49] The state's intervention into the private sphere makes them feel emasculated. In spite of their apparent disagreement about the role of fatherhood—most of the father's rights activists advocated for the traditional division of gender roles rather than nurturing fatherhood—*Kramer vs. Kramer* appropriated the father's rights movement's misogyny and hatred toward the law for its own agenda of recuperating the patriarchy, while cloaking its anti-feminism with statements that seem to support gender neutrality.[50] Political Scientist Jocelyn Elise Crowley discusses that the father's rights activists distrust custody law for three reasons: state action is abusive and corrupt; "natural" (read: father-headed) family life is invaded by state

---

[48] Bergman and Asimow, *Reel Justice,* 317.
[49] Crowley, *Defiant Dads* 163.
[50] See Crowley, *Defiant Dads*. For discussion about fathers' rights movement, see also Susan Chira, "War Over Role of American Fathers," *New York Times* (June 19, 1994); Michael Kimmel, *Angry White Men: American Masculinity at the End of an Era* (New York: Nation Books, 2013), 135-168; Judith Stacey, "Dada-ism in the 1990s: Getting Past Baby Talk about Fatherlessness," ed. Cynthia R. Daniels, *Lost Fathers: The Politics of Fatherlessness in America* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 51-79.

action; state has been feminized.[51] As I have discussed, these three critiques about the state are mixed in *Kramer vs. Kramer*. No matter what kind of fatherhood they advocate (nurturing/breadwinning, untraditional/conventional, androgynous/masculine), they similarly criticize the corrupt and feminized state's intervention into their private life. In this way, neoliberalism gains its momentum by absorbing the agenda of neoconservatives; they can aim at the mutual enemy (legal entitlement given to women as a gendered group) even if their ultimate goal is totally different.[52]

Nurturing Father and Entrepreneur: Juggling Work and Family

Kramer vs. Kramer turns domestic labor into a scene of beauty by its persistent focus on a dialectic of work and family. Ted and Billy's domestic scenes look most innocent and beautiful when the element of labor is eliminated from these scenes. The contrast between two breakfast scenes stems not only from Ted's lack of experience as a housekeeper; Ted appears as an inappropriate father because he continues a one-way conversation while making French toast for the first time. Ted speaks too fast and too much in this scene, and it makes a stark contrast with the silence which dominates the later scene. Moreover, Ted's language in this scene is deceitful: Ted's words are as ugly as the lawyer's words at trial because they are both turned into an end itself and dismiss the well-being of a child.

In the earlier scene, Ted's non-stop talk also reflects his excessive concern about time and business. Following the admonition of his boss that he needs Ted "24 hours a day, 7 days a

[51] Crowley, *Defiant Dads,* 154-171. See also ibid, 118-142.
[52] Neoliberalism and neoconservatism agree in targeting on the welfare single mothers receive. See Melinda Cooper, *Family Values: Between Neoliberalism and the New Social Conservatism* (New York: Zone Books, 2017), 25-117.

week," he concentrates on his work even when he is at his home. Ted keeps talking aloud in this scene partly because he is in a rush. Billy wakes him up at 7:45, Billy needs to be at school by 8:30, and Ted has a major presentation in the morning. While Ted and Billy's timing perfectly matches in the second French toast scene, they disagree in the earlier scene: Ted does not understand that children have their own time. Ted's hectic talk and the disjointed nature of the editing disrupt Ted's and the viewer's identification with the helpless child who is just abandoned by his mother, while Ted and Billy's silent tableau of the later scene almost stops time. *Kramer vs. Kramer* is the least pathetic when time is dominated by Ted's obsession with business, and the most pathetic and emotional when Ted correctly understands how limited and valuable his time with Billy is.

However, this is not to say that *Kramer vs. Kramer* predominantly focuses on the domestic routine as a static, timeless and silent tableau; the pathetic emotion offered by the movie is heightened by its entanglement with the protagonist's action. While pathos and domesticity are conventionally associated with femininity in the gendered tradition of American culture, the film's interweaving of action scenes in the public sphere re-masculinizes the white middle-class father's melodramatic virtue. When Billy falls from a jungle gym, Ted frantically runs across the streets of Manhattan—ignoring all the red lights and beeping cars—holding bleeding Billy in his arms to take him to the emergency room. The camera's speedy pan is exceptional in a film which mostly focuses on the static beauty of a father and a son's domesticity; representing Ted as a courageous and risk-taking individual—it is as if he alone were in the battlefield, isolated from the business world of Manhattan—this scene retrieves a white middle-class father's heroism and mobility in the public sphere. Furthermore, Ted's masculine action addresses his melodramatic

virtue of enduring the pain; in the following scene at the hospital, Ted, with his face and shirt blood-soaked, insists on accompanying Billy during the surgery. Not unlike in the second French toast scene, the camera screens Ted's imperturbable face in profile while the audience hears Billy whimpers in agony. As Eagle discusses, "[in] melodrama, . . . suffering and vulnerability are emblematic of moral goodness, and the spectacle of bodily assault frequently bestows upon its victims the stamp of moral authority."[53] By sensationally addressing a child's vulnerability and pain, the film reinforces the white middle-class man's traditionally masculine virtue of self-control.

Given the movie's constant focus on the conflict between work and family, the most important action scene in this movie is that of Ted's job hunting. Domestic scenes in *Kramer vs. Kramer* look pathetic because Ted and Billy are constantly threatened by external forces; the conflict between Ted's work and family is one of them, but Ted resolves such a conflict by his action of aggressively marketing his human capital. When he is fired by his boss, he has to find a job within a day to prove in the courtroom that he is fit as Billy's parent. Ted cannot find a job easily because it is the day before Christmas Eve and nobody is interested in hiring somebody. Nevertheless, Ted never surrenders. He insists on getting an interview with an advertising company on that day, and he even slams down the phone on the table to make the officer in the employment agency call the company right away; he is controlling the situation even if he is out of work. When he gets the interview, he tells the advertising director that it is his "one-day only offer." His offer reverses the relationship between the worker and capital; while Ted's time is controlled by his boss in his first company, here Ted controls his human capital and time. In this sequence, Ted retrieves his masculinity by commodifying his human capital. While he waits for

[53] Eagle, *Imperial Affects*, 129.

the company's decision as to his hiring, he motionlessly sits down on a chair at the end of the party room; the camera's focus on Ted is frequently disrupted by jovial workers who drink, chatter, and dance to the joyful background music, which ironically underscores Ted's isolation and emasculation. As if to compensate for such humiliating lack of mobility, after Ted gets a job offer, he confidently walks through partying crowd and suddenly kisses a blond-haired lady and says merry Christmas. Ted's sexual harassment is unquestioned in the movie because it is displayed within a melodramatic framework in which the white middle-class father unjustly loses and regains his job. Once he has been victorious in his heroic action scene, Ted can now reclaim the power of sexual harassment as a prerogative of masculinity.

Ted's nurturing fatherhood is underpinned by the movie's embrace of neoliberal entrepreneurship; he can juggle work and family because as an entrepreneur, he has the power to control his time rather than being controlled by his work. Ted offers his human capital as a kind of an entrepreneur. In a neoliberal world, capital is what an individual owns, not only what his company has.[54] Thus, as Corkin discusses, this movie is "significant in codifying the terms of the *new class*: that is, a class that is emblematic of a postindustrial economy and mode of production."[55] Indeed, Ted literally shows the portfolio of his selected works as a designer in the job interview; as Wendy Brown discusses, "*homo oeconomicus* as human capital is concerned with enhancing its portfolio value in all domains of its life, an activity undertaken through

[54] Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 225.
[55] Corkin, *Starring New York,* 164-165. See also Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class: And How It's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), and Zygmunt Bauman, *Work, Consumerism and the New Poor* (Berkshire: Open UP, 2005) for the analysis about the emergence of the new creative class.

practices of self-investment and attracting investors."[56] *Kramer vs. Kramer* is itself a portfolio of a white middle-class father's lifestyle: Ted designs not only ads but his lifestyle.

However, this is not to say that all individuals own such capital regardless of their race, gender, and class. It is a privilege given to a limited number of intellectual and knowledge-workers—mostly white middle-class men. No matter how much *Kramer vs. Kramer* looks like an everyman's story, the choice of juggling work and family is not given to the majority of American workers.[57] To put it differently, *Kramer vs. Kramer* obscures the existence of domestic workers—mostly female immigrants—who actually take charge of white middle-class families.[58] Ted can be an exclusive object of pathos and suffering thanks to the absence of women of color who take care of white middle-class families at the price of their own home life. A white middle-class father's home offers a point of melodramatic identification while that of female immigrant workers cannot; appropriating the position of victim, *Kramer vs. Kramer* whitewashes the locus of domestic suffering.

The temporal urgency in Ted's job hunting scene is also essential to the melodramatic sentiment the movie evokes. Williams writes that "the spectacular essence of melodrama seems to rest in those moments of temporal prolongation when 'in the nick of time' defies 'too late.'"[59] In this scene, Ted secures his job (and thus, his rights to stay with Billy) in the nick of time. Inserting several cuts of the clock and displaying the office workers drinking and dancing in the

---

[56] Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (New York: Zone Books, 2015), 33-34. See also Michel Feher, "Self-appreciation; or, the Aspiration of Human Capital." *Public Culture* 21.1 (2009), 21-41.
[57] Corkin, *Starring New York,* 175.
[58] Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, *Servants of Globalization: Migration and Domestic Work* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2001).
[59] Williams, "Melodrama Revised," 74.

Christmas party while Ted has the job interview, the movie underscores how urgent Ted's situation is. Sensationally displaying Ted's action of job hunting, the movie increases the temporal tension and thus shows Ted's strong will to control his time. As Neale argues, temporal urgency in melodrama often induces pathos: "Tears can come . . . provided there is a delay, and the possibility, therefore, that it *may* come too late."[60] The viewer can feel the sense of loss while Ted struggles to find a job, and his job hunting looks heroic because it is underpinned by the pathos as such. Ted cannot keep his time with Billy as long as his time is controlled by his business; *Kramer vs. Kramer* relieves such an anxiety about the ravage of corporate capitalism by turning the white middle-class father into an entrepreneurial subject of self-management.

Kramer vs. Kramer shows the birth of the neoliberal lifestyle in which white middle-class individuals choose family and work. Ted solves his dilemma of work and family by not separating them; he incorporates work and family under his ownership and management. One of the most climactic scenes of the movie shows a utopian space in which family and work coexist in harmony. When Ted obtains his new job, he takes Billy to his new office. His office is located at the top of the building, and Ted and Billy look at Manhattan's skyscrapers from his office. They are literally at the zenith in this scene: Ted and Billy's excitement demonstrates the triumph of the white middle-class father's flexible lifestyle, while most women would likely be criticized for confusing work and family when they make such a choice. By taking Billy to his office, Ted teaches him the significance of such a new lifestyle. As Foucault argues, in the age of neoliberalism educational investment is not limited to schooling and job training.[61] In light of this, this scene can be also seen as a new type of educational investment for human capital.

[60] Neale, "Melodrama and Tears," 11.
[61] Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 229.

Ted and Billy see the skyscrapers from his new office

However, such a moment of bliss does not last long in *Kramer vs. Kramer*; the movie illustrates how the white middle-class father is aggrieved by the ghost of the breadwinner ideal. Ted is persecuted in the courtroom precisely because his lifestyle is too novel. Joanna's lawyer accuses Ted of deviating from the norm of the breadwinning fatherhood.[62] He intricately asks Joanna and Ted how much income they earn. Joanna's annual income is $31,000—surprising for a female reentry job—and Ted's is $28,200. Ted first replies that it is "almost" $29,000, but the lawyer persists in more specific amount. By so doing, the lawyer effectively shows the judge (and the audience) how Ted is secretly afraid and ashamed of his lower income. This scene radically misrepresents economic realities of the time; as of 1979, the median annual earnings of

[62] As for the norm of breadwinning fatherhood, see Robert O. Self, *All in the Family: The Realiginment of American Democracy since the 1960s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012), 17-46.

year-round, full-time female workers were 62.4% of that of male workers.[63] By reversing the gender pay gap in the real world, the movie makes the audience sympathize with a white middle-class man; predicated on the assumption that men should earn more than women do, the audience is solicited to feel pity for him because he is emotionally emasculated in this scene.[64] In other words, the audience admires Ted because he bears up bravely under economic humiliation. Furthermore, stating that "Mr. Kramer, you're the only person I've heard of who's working his way down the ladder of success," the lawyer shows how he persists in an obsolete ideal of breadwinning fatherhood. The lawyer's anachronistic view on fatherhood frustrates the audience as well as Ted because the movie as a whole welcomes the emergence of a new fatherhood, which looks more gender-neutral. Again, in the real world, it is single mothers who have no choice but to go "down the ladder" when they got divorced.[65] In this way, *Kramer vs. Kramer* shifts attention from single mother's poverty and evokes white middle-class men's anxiety that feminism would disempower them in terms of not only family but economy.

Joanna's lawyer further frustrates the audience by confusing the interests of the company with the interests of the child. He repeatedly emphasizes how Ted inflicted substantial damage on his previous company by abandoning his business duty. Answering the lawyer's questions, Ted tries to explain how he prioritizes caring for Billy; however, the lawyer's sophistries do not allow him to do so. The lawyer asks him a question: "The Spring of last year, did you or did you not miss a deadline on the Mid-Atlantic airline's account causing your company not only a great deal of embarrassment but considerable financial liability as well?" Ted answers: "On that day I

[63] Francine D. Blau and Lawrence M. Kahn, "The U.S. Gender Pay Gap in the 1990s: Slowing Convergence." *ILR Review* 60.1 (2006), 45.
[64] Bailin, 15.
[65] Crowley, 109-111.

had to go home because my child was sick." But before Ted finishes his answer, the lawyer presses on with his question: "Did you or did you not miss the deadline?" This scene epitomizes how the law heartlessly ignores the best interests of the child; Ted clarifies that Billy had a very high fever, but the lawyer intentionally shifts their attention from Ted's selfless love for Billy to impress his failure as a businessperson. The movie contrasts Ted's burst of emotion—as he explains his situation, he almost yells out, "he had a 104 temperature, he's lying there sweating, I go home to be with him!"—and the lawyer's businesslike way of speaking which does not change throughout the inquiry.[66] What is worse, the judge advocates for the lawyer—he insists on clarifying whether Ted missed the deadline or not—suggesting that the law systematically supports the idea that the interests of a company are more significant than the interests of a child. The movie illustrates how Ted and Billy are vulnerable to and powerless against an obsolete ideology of Fordist capitalism which favors the interest of the enterprise rather than that of human capital.

Kramer vs. Kramer's resentment for the law and Fordist capitalism is rather surprising because throughout the twentieth century, the law played a significant part in protecting American workers from the excesses of Fordist capitalism. Ted as a father could benefit from some laws that would protect his family and constrain his company from enslaving him; nevertheless, the film wants less law, not more. In other words, Ted requires the deregulation of the law, rather than the regulation by the law. Ted solves the dilemma of work and family

[66] In reality, emotion plays an instrumental role in underpinning the legal decision. See Martha C. Nussbaum, *Hiding from Humanity: Disgust, Shame, and the Law* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2004).

personally, not systematically. Disillusioned by the law's obsolete and inflexible nature, Ted is not so interested in changing the society; he cares primarily about the well-being of himself and his family, hence foreseeing Margaret Thatcher's neoliberal manifest that "there's no such thing as society . . . there are individual men and women, and there are families." As such, *Kramer vs. Kramer* endorses the neoliberal illusion that the law is nonbeneficial for an individual and only helpful for people who refuse to stand up and become self-regulated individuals.

The movie accuses the law of protecting women as a gendered group rather than a white middle-class father as an individual. Although the film shows that conditions of Fordist work are destructive to family life, it quickly transfers the blame for family suffering from corporate greed to women and feminism. *Kramer vs. Kramer* makes the audience believe that a white middle-class father doubly suffers from the inhumane law because it helps the company control his private time while giving special privileges to women. Drawing on the melodramatic moral conflict between virtue and vice, *Kramer vs. Kramer* creates a new kind of cultural illusion that the law is controlled by Fordist capitalism and women and white middle-class men's human capital is under assault.

In other words, the law's intervention into white middle-class men's privacy is questioned because they are believed to make "right" choices. On the contrary, the law's intervention into women's privacy is naturalized because women are believed to make "irrational" choices. The movie evokes anxiety that a white middle-class father can fall into the underclass—like stereotypical single mothers, which I will discuss more fully in the following chapter—when he has to juggle work and family. However, Ted overcomes such a fear by making right choices. In contrast, the movie suggests that Joanna might not be able to earn enough money to support her family if she needs to juggle work and family like Ted does. In short, Ted's choice in *Kramer vs.*

Kramer looks heroic because it is implicitly contrasted with the stereotyped image of (purportedly colored) single mothers in poverty: Ted never thinks of relying on the welfare state. Ted's nurturing of Billy can be deemed as a right "choice" of a self-governed individual because it goes hand in hand with the updated market economy in the age of neoliberalism.

Conclusion

The white middle-class man's appropriation of feminist ideals in *Kramer vs. Kramer* goes hand in hand with the emerging men's and fathers' rights movement in the late 1970s. As Eagle discusses, "[as] the men's rights discourse became more virulently antifeminist, men were claimed as the victims of traditional feminist concerns. . . . A major rallying cry was the issue of fathers' rights. . . . [which argued] that while feminist 'male-bashing' cast men as the oppressors, women actually wielded the most social power."[67] *Kramer vs. Kramer* appropriates maternal melodrama to usurp feminine gender roles and highlight the white middle-class father's suffering and endurance as a victim of "reversed" gender discrimination. For a white middle-class father like Ted Kramer, home is a symbol of his liberation rather than oppression. Drawing on the framework of melodrama, *Kramer vs. Kramer* attests to the white middle-class father's moral and emotional redemption; while before-Ted could not feel for others and thus feels not good to the audience, after-Ted feels good because he does not refrain from feeling. In light of this, Ted's repression of tears does not suggest men's lack of emotion; rather, Ted's emotion is paradoxically underscored by his effort to repress tears and persevere the pain, which is contrasted with the law's and woman's lack of humane emotion.

[67] Jonna Eagle, "Men's Movements." Ed. Bret E. Caroll, *American Masculinities: A Historical Encyclopedia* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publication, 2003), 302.

As I discussed in the previous chapter, white middle-class fathers' burst of emotion obscures the pain systematically inflicted on women. Discussing the significance of the emotional liberation in the men's liberation movement, Sally Robinson states: "In part based on a limited understanding of women's liberation as a program for personal growth rather than a movement for social justice, men's liberation discourse focused on the psychological and bodily harms suffered by men whose health was endangered by the blockage of emotional expression."[68] The film's melodramatic portrayal of Ted's personal growth obliterates what Hochschild calls "the second shift"; reversing the real world's gender hierarchy, *Kramer vs. Kramer* solves the conflict between work and family individually, not systematically.

Kramer vs. Kramer's individualization of the structural problem is emblematic of melodrama: as Anker discusses, "[melodrama] implies that self-reliance is both possible and the norm of proper subjecthood, that social suffering has a single and easily identifiable cause that can be recognized and redressed by the individual . . . and that all individuals can overcome heteronomy through their own agentic capacity."[69] Demonstrating the white middle-class father's moral triumph through his victimization, *Kramer vs. Kramer* normalizes a nurturing father's self-governance as a neoliberal subject of choice. Embracing the choices Ted makes in the public and private realms, *Kramer vs. Kramer* turns the father's domestic labor into a risk-taking lifestyle choice; in a neoliberal world, a white middle-class man chooses everything without relying on the state, law or women.

---

[68] Sally Robinson, "Men's Liberation, Men's Wounds: Emotion, Sexaulity, and the Reconstruction of Masculinity in the 1970s." eds. Milette Shamir and Jennifer Travis, *Boys Don't Cry? Rethinking Narratives of Masculinity and Emotion in the U.S.*, 206. Robinson puts less emphasis on the difference between the men's liberation movement and the men's rights movement. While the former emerges in the early 1970s See Eagle,

[69] Anker, *Orgies of Feeling*, 176. See also Williams, "Melodrama Revised," 68-69 and 75.

Chapter Four—*Mrs. Doubtfire*:

Melodramatic Suffering and the Reassertion of Power through Laughter

Following the box office hit of *Kramer vs. Kramer* in 1979, a cycle of films about nurturing fatherhood emerged in the 1980s.[1] Drawing on the convention of comedy movies, most of these movies—e.g. *Author! Author!* (Hiller 1982), *Mr. Mom* (Dragoti 1983), *Three Men and a Baby* (Nimoy 1987) and its sequels, *Parenthood* (Howard 1989), *Look Who's Talking* (Heckerling 1989) and its sequels—use humor to portray the challenges white middle-class fathers face, while *Kramer vs. Kramer* demonstrates Ted Kramer's transformation into a nurturing father in a melodramatic way.[2] Nevertheless, these comedy movies are not so far from *Kramer vs. Kramer* in their incorporation of melodramatic elements; the nurturing fathers in these movies are often represented as victims who are suddenly left with the burden of housework in the absence of mothers. To explore the representation of the white middle-class father in the 1990s, this chapter will analyze the interaction of melodrama and comedy in *Mrs. Doubtfire* (Columbus 1993). Next to *Jurassic Park* (Spielberg 1993), this movie ranked second in this year's box office.[3] Featuring Robin Williams whose "trademark casting on and off of voices and identities mirrors [the] atmosphere of crisis in which men were perceived to be

---

[1] Stella Bruzzi, *Bringing up Daddy: Fatherhood and Masculinity in Post-war Hollywood* (London: British Film Institute, 2005), 115-151.

[2] The comical lifestyle of nurturing fathers also becomes a central focus of sit-coms like *Growing Pains* (1985) and *Full House* (1987). Another movie which bridges Chapter Three and Chapter Four is *Tootsie* (Pollack 1982) featuring Dustin Hoffman. With the film's focus on male cross-dressing, *Tootsie* is often compared with *Mrs. Doubtfire*. For example, see Yvonne Tasker, *Working Girls: Gender and Sexuality in Popular Cinema* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 31-34 and Stella Bruzzi, *Undressing Cinema: Clothing and Identity in the Movies* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 156-164.

[3] Information courtesy of Box Office Mojo. Used with permission.

floundering, unsure of how to 'be' a man," *Mrs. Doubtfire* attests to white middle-class men's increased fear about precariousness in the 1990s and their reassertion of patriarchal power through a melodramatic discourse.[4]

Focusing on the melodramatic and comical aspect of *Mrs. Doubtfire*, this chapter traces both continuities and changes in the representations of white middle-class men as nurturing fathers. *Kramer vs. Kramer* and *Mrs. Doubtfire* are different not in their focus on white middle-class fathers as melodramatic victims but in their extent and scope. While the backlash movement was just beginning in 1979, there was a full-blown backlash against feminism by 1993, as Susan Faludi argues.[5] While in *Kramer vs. Kramer* it is the mother who must leave home and children, in *Mrs. Doubtfire* the mother exiles the father from his own home.

Similarly, racial and class anxiety is far more intensified in *Mrs. Doubtfire*; a white middle-class father's fear that he might lose his home resonates with the emergent discourse of the fatherless society in the 1990s. Approximately one month before *Mrs. Doubtfire* was released, conservative scholar Charles Murray published a controversial and influential essay "The Coming White Underclass" in the *Wall Street Journal*. Pinpointing illegitimacy as "the single most important social problem of our time—more important than crime, drugs, poverty, illiteracy, welfare or homelessness because it drives everything else," Murray melodramatically underlines the Manichean conflict between father-headed families and fatherless families.[6]

---

[4] Katie Barnett, "'Any Closer and You'd Be Mom': The Limits of Postfeminist Paternity in the Films of Robin Williams," eds. Elisabeth Abele and John A. Gronbeck-Tedesco, *Screening Images of American Masculinity in the Age of Postfeminism*, 19-20.

[5] For the analysis of the backlash movement in the late twentieth century, see Susan Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War against American Women* (New York: Broadway Books, 2006) and Michael Kimmel, *Angry White Men: American Masculinity at the End of an Era* (New York: Nation Books, 2013).

[6] Charles Murray, "The Coming White Underclass." *Wall Street Journal,* October 29, 1993, A14.

Murray's vitriolic criticism of fatherlessness, which is strongly influenced by the Moynihan report in 1965, echoes *Mrs. Doubtfire* in its marking of fatherlessness as non-white and underclass. Murray is not concerned about black matriarchy; even if "illegitimacy has now reached 68 percent of live births [of black families]" it is not news to him.[7] As Murray puts it, "[the] new trend that threatens the United States is white illegitimacy."[8] Likewise, in *Mrs. Doubtfire*, a white middle-class father Daniel Hillard is afraid that he loses his racial, sexual, and class privilege when he is expelled from his home: fatherlessness is the first step toward turning into an underclass other.

By exploring *Mrs. Doubtfire* as a comic melodrama, this chapter will discuss how Daniel's loss of identity as a white middle-class father and his disguise as "others" invite the audience's tears and laughter at the same time. Like *Kramer vs. Kramer*, this movie focuses on the suffering of a white middle-class nurturing father who loses both his job and family at the beginning of the movie. Unlike *Kramer vs. Kramer*, though, *Mrs. Doubtfire* turns the white middle-class father's pathetic suffering into scenes of amusement. The interaction between melodrama and comedy is rarely examined by film critics; notwithstanding Steve Neale's analysis of Charlie Chaplin's comedy movies as melodrama in his seminal essay "Melodrama and Tears," melodrama and comedy are generally deemed to be incompatible.[9] However, as Neale suggests, a comedy

---

[7] Ibid.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Steve Neale, "Melodrama and Tears." *Screen* 27.6 (November-December 1986), 16-17. For the analysis of Chaplin's movies as melodrama, see also Michael Woal and Linda Kowall Woal, "Chaplin and the Comedy of Melodrama," *Journal of Film and Video* 46.3 (Fall 1994), 3-15. John Mercer and Martin Shingler state that "this strategy [of focusing on the sufferings of the innocent] makes all Hollywood cinema, *except for comedy*, melodramatic given that the revelation of moral superiority is such a central and recurrent feature of American filmmaking" (italics added). John Mercer and Martin Shingler, *Melodrama: Genre, Style, Sensibility* (New York: Columbia UP, 2004), 90.

movie can be melodramatic if it focuses on the protagonist's moral righteousness and his/her pathetic victimization which stems from his/her morality.

Daniel's melodramatic suffering in *Mrs. Doubtfire* addresses white middle-class men's resentment against women. Daniel's frustration stems from the fact that his ex-wife Miranda has it all—a respectable, career-oriented job and custody rights to their three children—while he loses everything—a creative job, custody rights, and the nice house. However, Daniel does not patiently endure the pain of being a white middle-class father as Ted Kramer does. Grudging the entitlement given to women, Daniel literally turns himself into a woman. In response to Miranda's personal ads for a housekeeper, Daniel disguises himself as an old British nanny called Mrs. Doubtfire. Daniel changes his gender presentation because of his distrust in the gender-biased society: lamenting the gendered privilege given to women, Daniel tries to retrieve his power by disguising himself as a woman and turning her into a funny spectacle.

In *Mrs. Doubtfire*, Daniel's cross-dressing works as a source of both laughter and pathos. On the one hand, the movie is funny because Daniel performs the tight balancing act of juggling his outer femininity and inner masculinity. The persona of Mrs. Doubtfire is very fragile, but Daniel struggles desperately; to literally save his/her face, he quickly takes on different personalities. Causing the tension that his true identity can be revealed any time, his hectic gender performance makes the movie funny as well as sensational and thrilling. On the other hand, Daniel's cross-dressing is also pathetic: he is so powerless as a white middle-class father that he has to hide his inner self—his identity as a white middle-class father—to keep in touch with his children. Drawing on the convention of melodrama, Daniel becomes the moral center of the movie and solicits the audience's pathetic identification. In contrast, other characters

misrecognize his morality; Daniel has to literally mask his fatherhood because other characters—most importantly, Miranda and the law enforcement, including the social worker—find it as an immoral force which destroys the future of children. As Neale suggests, melodramatic tears are invoked by such discrepancies between the audience's and the characters' knowledge: "For the spectator, the figure is *lovable*, but for many characters in the films he is a disturbance, a nuisance, worthy only of ridicule, rejection or contempt. They have no access to our knowledge and position as spectators. . . . Hence the pathos and tears marking the endings of those films in which he is rejected."[10] Although Daniel is not rejected at the end of the movie, the pathos and tears are everywhere in the film because his virtue as a white middle-class father is unrecognized by every character except his children.

Representing a white middle-class father as a powerless victim, *Mrs. Doubtfire* also addresses white middle-class men's resentment against the law and the state. Closing with the reunion of Daniel and his children, the movie celebrates a white middle-class father's liberation from regulations of the welfare state; the law's intervention into the family is represented as immoral in *Mrs. Doubtfire*. The film marks Daniel's moral triumph against the law and the state by drawing on the melodramatic deployment of the dialectic between pathos and laughter: on the one hand, the movie pathetically illustrates Daniel's suffering from a hardheaded female social worker's intervention into his family. On the other hand, *Mrs. Doubtfire* restores a white middle-class father's authority by reinforcing the stereotypes of the social worker and making fun of her. The film underscores a nurturing father's sympathetic care for his children by contrasting it with the female social worker's lack of emotion.

[10] Neale, "Melodrama and Tears," 16.

Turning the relationship between capital and labor upside down, Daniel turns himself into an "entrepreneur of himself" who first invents the persona of Mrs. Doubtfire in his family and then transports it into his TV business. As Zygmunt Bauman discusses, the neoliberal norm of labor "elevates certain professions to the rank of engrossing, refined objects of aesthetic, indeed artistic, experience, while denying to other kinds of remunerated livelihood-securing occupations any value at all."[11] *Mrs. Doubtfire* negatively portrays the menial labor in which the worker's creativity and choice—what Foucault calls the human capital—are dismissed and ruined by his bosses.[12] Drawing on the melodramatic convention of the protagonist's moral triumph through his humiliation, Daniel not only endures painstaking unskilled labor but, like Ted Kramer, retrieves the creative job he thinks he deserves at the end of the movie as well as his children. Mrs. Doubtfire is a heroic character who resolves the purported crisis of the family and labor for white middle-class men who feel as if their naturalized entitlement in the public and private sphere were thwarted by others, even if such "aggrieved entitlement," in Michael Kimmel's terms, "is a marker not of depravation (sic) but of privilege."[13] In other words, the film underscores a white middle-class father's vulnerability under neoliberalism because such vulnerability is indispensable for underpinning the entitlement he enjoys.

However, *Mrs. Doubtfire* does not simply welcome the entrepreneurial lifestyle; old and new middle-class masculinity are in constant negotiation in this movie. Throughout the movie, Daniel is anxious that his family is deprived of him by Stu, Miranda's new boyfriend who enjoys the yuppie lifestyle. Stu embodies what Daniel does not have: the self-invested body, cultural

---

[11] Zygmunt Bauman, *Work, Consumerism and the New Poor* (Berkshire: Open UP, 2005), 33.
[12] Michael Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the College de France 1978-1979,* ed. Michel Senellart, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2004), 226.
[13] Kimmel, *Angry White Men*, 24.

sophistication, and success as an entrepreneurial businessperson. In *Fear of Falling*, Barbara Ehrenreich argues that the yuppie's "strategy involved such a betrayal of traditional middle-class values—such a wholesale surrender to the priorities of profit and the pleasures of consumerism."[14] By elaborating on the tension between Daniel and Stu, *Mrs. Doubtfire* shows white middle-class men's mixed feelings about a yuppie lifestyle and its embrace of consumerism. To borrow from Ehrenreich, the New Class is "the locus of the most acute *conflict* over hedonism, the nexus of the most pronounced tension between modernism and tradition, consumerism and self-discipline."[15] Daniel understands that entrepreneurial subjectivity is a key to juggling work and family, but he is also afraid that it ruins his rugged masculinity; Daniel ridicules Stu—he is an interior designer, which is stereotypically associated with gayness—because Daniel takes the yuppie lifestyle to equate with a cultural feminization. Daniel resolves such a tension by equilibrating the old and new middle-class masculinity. By showing their compatibility, the movie eases white middle-class men's "fear of falling" while reinforcing the borderlines of gender and class.

Similarly, Daniel does not simply embrace femininity by playing the role of an old nanny; masculinity and femininity are constantly negotiated in *Mrs. Doubtfire*. Daniel's cross-dressing should be understood as a white middle-class man's cultural appropriation of femininity. Being a woman is the object of both envy and anxiety for the white middle-class man; Daniel secretly desires to enjoy the entitlement given to women while he despises it. As Peter Brooks argues, in melodrama "the domain of operative spiritual values . . . is both indicated within and masked by

[14] Barbara Ehrenreich, *Fear of Falling: The Inner Life of the Middle Class* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1990), 200.
[15] Ibid, 248.

the surface of reality."[16] Daniel is temporarily liberated from the yoke of breadwinning fatherhood when he plays the personality of Mrs. Doubtfire; he can show his unconditional love for his children only in the disguise of a female domestic worker. Nevertheless, Daniel is constantly afraid that his cross-dressing will undermine his identity as a white middle-class father. He wants to love his children as a father; no matter how the persona of Mrs. Doubtfire is loved by his children, female impersonation is a humiliating and masochistic act for Daniel because he has to repress his inner masculinity.

In spite of the movie's focus on the subject of cross-dressing, *Mrs. Doubtfire* is one of the films which "are functional in providing a ritualistic release for a heterosexual economy that must constantly police its own boundaries against the invasion of queerness, and that this displaced production and resolution of homosexual panic actually fortifies the heterosexual regime in its self-perpetuating task," to borrow from Judith Butler.[17] Given Mrs. Doubtfire's Victorian motherhood and celibacy, Daniel's cross-dressing is far from queer; his heterosexual male drag ridicules women and reinforces, rather than complicates, the borderline between men and women.

Furthermore, Daniel's cross-dressing is represented as indispensable to his economic success; as Lisa Duggan discusses, neoliberalism's "rhetorical commitment to diversity" and its

---

[16] Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1976),ooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, 5.

[17] Butler names films such as *Victor, Victoria*, *Tootsie*, and *Some Like It Hot* as examples. Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 126. See also Lucy J. Miller, "Becoming One of the Girls/Guys: Distancing Transgender Representations in Popular Film Comedies." Eds. Leland G. Spencer and Jamie C. Capuzza, *Transgender Communication Studies: Histories, Trends, and Trajectories* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2015), 135. and Sara Salih, "On Judith Butler and Performativity." Eds. Karen E. Lovaas and Mercilee M. Jenkins, *Sexualities and Communication in Everyday Life: A Reader* (Los Angeles: Sage Publishing, 2006), 58.

"narrow, formal, nonredistributive form of 'equality' politics for the new millennium" waters down the politics of the LGBT movement.[18] The movie embraces the persona of Mrs. Doubtfire because she embodies the middle-class domesticity and the ethos of consumerism, which are counterposed with the culture of poverty embodied by the stereotype of undomesticated single mothers of color. As such, *Mrs. Doubtfire* depoliticizes LGBT politics and turns a cross-dressed male into a commodity to amuse the eyes of the audience.

Mrs. Doubtfire as Melodrama: a White Middle-class Man's Lifestyle Inspected

Drawing on the framework of melodrama, *Mrs. Doubtfire* displays Daniel's moral virtue from the very beginning of the film.[19] Daniel suffers in this movie because he is too moral. At the beginning of the movie, he loses his job as a voiceover artist because he cares too much about children's well-being. While providing the voices for a children's cartoon, Daniel ad-libs lines to protest against the situation that a little bird smokes a cigarette. After the quarrel, Daniel is fired by his boss: he is punished because he confuses the public and private interests while his boss is primarily concerned about his business, as in *Kramer vs. Kramer*. Daniel is not just a breadwinner; he cares for children, and his vicarious sympathy with children offers a melodramatic point of identification in which the audience is solicited to participate. Ted and Daniel's nurturing fatherhood stands out in the movies all the more because its novelty is highlighted by business-oriented and heartless masculinity represented by their bosses. While having a quarrel with his boss, Daniel asks the technicians: "Do you think it's morally right to

[18] Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003), 44.
[19] The opera song "The Barber of Seville" in the opening cartoon suggests disguise as the film's central narrative device.

promote smoking to the youth of America?" Then, the camera is switched to the close up of three technicians who make hostile expression in their faces, smoking cigarettes in a booth. Daniel states: "They're biased. That's a mistrial." Daniel is on a mock trial in this scene: his morality and sympathy with children are treated as a nuisance in the business-oriented society that cares little about the well-being of children. His crime is against the norm of breadwinning fatherhood under which fathers are supposed to distinguish public and private interests. Nonetheless, he is the moral minority in this mock courtroom. Daniel loses in the trial, and his voice is taken from him in punishment: Daniel's loss of his job as a voice artist encapsulates melodrama's muteness which I discussed in the previous chapter.

The courtroom scenes in *Mrs. Doubtfire* work as the melodramatic backbone of the movie. Structurally, Daniel's comic cross-dressing—which is situated at the center of the movie—is sandwiched by two trial scenes in *Mrs. Doubtfire*. These trial scenes determine the movie's underlying emotion: pathos and suffering. The first courtroom scene demonstrates the law and judge's authority and Daniel's powerlessness as an individual. The camera pans from above when this sequence unfolds; using a high angle shot of the courtroom, the movie emphasizes the powerlessness of individuals in front of the law. Then, the camera underscores the authority of the judge by slowly zooming in and focusing on him while he is reading the verdict. The judge clarifies that the law is gender-neutral in terms of the custody rights: "although these custody proceedings have always tended to favor the mother, we also realize perhaps now more than ever, that it is not in a child's best interest to deprive him or her of an obviously loving father." The judge seems to be primarily concerned about the best interests of the child; nevertheless, he makes the decision to award sole custody to Miranda because Daniel has neither job nor place to live. Like *Kramer vs. Kramer*, *Mrs. Doubtfire* demonstrates a white middle-class father's

neoliberal resentment against the feminized state: no matter how the law looks gender-neutral in its nominal application of the best interests of the child, it sides with the mother when they are divorced.[20]

Daniel's neoliberal resentment against the law finds validity thanks to his melodramatic affect; the law looks rational in not awarding the custody to the father who has neither a job nor home, but the film invokes the threat that a white middle-class father's visceral sympathy with his children is hampered by the law's rationality. In response to the judge's decision, Daniel straightforwardly states how he loves his children: "I have to be with my children. It's not a question, really. . . . I haven't been away from them for more than one day since the day they were born." The close-up image of Daniel's pathetic face unveils his "true feeling" as a nurturing father: Daniel's love for his children is represented as natural, which should not be intruded by the law's heartless rule. As Lauren Berlant discusses in "The Subject of True Feeling," "[feeling politics] claims a hard-wired truth, a core of common sense. It is beyond ideology, beyond mediation, beyond contestation."[21] Representing Daniel's love for his children as a hard-wired truth which should not be questioned by anybody, *Mrs. Doubtfire* naturalizes the fatherly love as a locus of melodramatic innocence, which is constantly threatened by the law's violation of privacy.

Similarly, the judge's second decision to award full custody to Miranda inflicts further suffering on Daniel. Soliciting the audience's pathetic identification, this sequence evokes the melodramatic sentiment that true judgments are made with emotion and the heart rather than reason and rules; as Peter Brooks discusses, in melodrama "the expression of emotional and

---

[20] Barnett, "'Any Closer and You'd Be Mom,' 30-31.
[21] Lauren Berlant, "The Subject of True Feeling," eds. Austin Sarat and Thomas R. Kearns, *Cultural Pluralism, Identity Politics, and the Law* (Ann Arbor: UP of Michigan, 1999), 58.

moral integers is indistinguishable."[22] While the judge announces the sentences, the camera cross-cuts between Daniel's pained face and the judge's blank face. The judge's face rarely changes throughout this sequence while the close-ups of Daniel emotion—he smiles when he talks about his children, and he almost cries when the judge makes the decision—illuminate his child-like innocence and vulnerability. Also, the movie effectively addresses Daniel's melodramatic suffering by using pathetic background music. As Brooks discusses, in melodrama music is used to "strike a particular emotional pitch or coloring and lead the audience into a change or heightening of mood."[23] In this sequence, the slow tempo of sentimental music marks the end of Daniel's hectic, "queer," and comic performance and prepares the audience for melodramatic identification.

This sequence underlines Daniel's sentimentality by drawing on the melodramatic rhetoric which, as Brooks observed, "tends toward the inflated and the sententious."[24] This time acting as his own lawyer—which shows his distrust in the law and belief in individualism—Daniel hyperbolically states how he loves his children as a father:

> I love them with all my heart, and the idea of someone telling me I can't be with them, I can't see them every day. Well, it's like someone saying I can't have air. I can't live without air and I can't live without them. Listen, I would do anything, I just want to be with them. . . . They mean everything to me and they need me as much as I need them. So, please, don't take my kids away from me. Thank you.

---

[22] Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, 42. See also Jonna Eagle, *Imperial Affects: Sensational Melodrama and the Attractions of American Cinema* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2017), 6-7.
[23] Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, 48-49.
[24] Ibid, 40.

Underscoring the sense of unity and oneness—which appropriates the maternal virtue—this statement naturalizes the bond between the father and children. Daniel's choice of monosyllabic words and plain rhetoric attests to melodrama's merging of morality and emotion and its rejection of rationality. As Brooks discusses, "[the] search for a dramaturgy of admiration and astonishment needs a rhetoric that can infuse the banal and the ordinary with the excitement of grandiose conflict."[25] Fatherly love is "the banal and the ordinary," but Daniel's melodramatic rhetoric turns it into an object of "grandiose conflict." Daniel's speech is heartfelt and thus touching for the audience who identifies with him; nevertheless, the judge does not sympathize with him at all: he says, "your little speech seemed very heartfelt and genuine. But I believe it to be a terrific performance by a very gifted actor. Nothing more." The judge sees Daniel's melodramatic sentiment as a performance which covers his "potentially harmful" nature. The movie's melodramatic sentiment is addressed by what Gledhill calls "misrecognition of the innocence of a central protagonist."[26] The movie dramatizes such misrecognition by foregrounding the judge's power of monitoring and making a (mis)judgement on a white middle-class man's privacy. Daniel's love for his children is evident to the audience, but other characters in the film do not recognize his virtue as such.

This sequence also attends to white middle-class fathers' anxiety that their fatherly love is marked as queer; confusing Daniel's heterosexual male drag with queerness, the judge's hetero-normative gaze sees Daniel's impersonation not as an evidence of his fatherly love but queerness. As I discussed in Chapter Two, the anxiety of being marked as "queer" is

---

[25] Ibid, 40.
[26] Christine Gledhill, "The Melodramatic Field: An Investigation," ed. Christine Gledhill, *Home is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film* (London: British Film Institute, 1987), 30.

instrumental for underpinning white middle-class nurturing father's melodramatic victimhood. When the identity of Mrs. Doubtfire is finally disclosed, the judge declares Daniel's "unorthodox lifestyle" harmful for children and gives Daniel only supervised visitation rights once a week. The blank-faced judge is represented as a dope who takes Daniel's sexual performance at face value. Confusing the means of Daniel's cross-dressing with its ends, the judge cannot see the hidden affect under the mask of Mrs. Doubtfire: a white middle-class father's innocent and thus non-sexual love for his kids.

Drawing on the rhetoric of the backlash, Daniel protests against reverse gender discrimination: while maternal love for children is naturalized, paternal love for children is considered sexually deviant and turned into an object to be cautiously watched. Thus, Daniel blames not only the law but Miranda for turning him into a "sexual pervert." Daniel complains to Miranda: "You took my children away from me. I can only see them now with supervision. Some woman comes and watches me with the kids like I'm some sort of deviant. If I try to hug them, she wonders why. You know what that's like? You just sat there in that courtroom, you knew the truth, you didn't say a word and you let that judge pass that despicable sentence." Daniel grudges how his relationship with his children is torn apart by the conspiracy between his ex-wife and the state. Targeting the stigmatized cultural icon of a social worker, Daniel's resentment looks familiar in the age of neoliberalism: a social worker turns normal into abnormal.[27] *Mrs. Doubtfire* evokes anxiety that the state, with the help of his ex-wife, intervenes into a normal white middle-class father's family by marking him as queer and calling his lifestyle "unorthodox."

[27] For the representation of social workers in American films, see Miriam L. Freeman and Deborah P. Valentine, "Through the Eyes of Hollywood: Images of Social Workers in Film." *Social Worker* 49.2 (2004), 151-161.

Daniel's melodramatic victimhood as a white middle-class father hinges on his pathologization of transsexual fatherhood; the film represents a heterosexual father's love as natural and normal while transsexuality is represented as unnatural, abnormal, and harmful for children. As literary critic Victoria Flanagan discusses, "[the] hegemonic construction of masculinity within *Mrs. Doubtfire* views homosexuality as a threat to masculine identity, and because of the cultural association of cross-dressing with homosexuality, the simple act of a male putting on a dress is accordingly treated with panic and suspicion."[28] Such panic and suspicion is in part augmented by Daniel's stereotypical aversion to transsexuality. Before his disguise as Mrs. Doubtfire, Daniel threatens Miranda by performing the voice of a transsexual housekeeper who would not take care of a boy because he "used to be one." In spite of his cross-dressing, Daniel stigmatizes transsexuality and associates the norm of fatherhood with heterosexuality. Moreover, when his son asks him if he really likes wearing women's costume, Daniel replies: "It's a pain in a padded ass. This is not a way of life. It's just a job." Daniel can disguise as a woman as long as it is temporal and profitable, but he cannot stand being categorized as transsexual; Daniel tolerates cross-dressing for the purpose of business, not lifestyle. Daniel's view on sexuality is, then, not so far from the judge's; unlike the judge, Daniel sees his cross-dressing as temporal, but he and the judge share the sexual stereotype that a transsexual father is "unorthodox" and dangerous to children, implicitly associating transsexuality with homosexuality and homosexuality, in turn, with child molestation.

The movie's equivocal embrace of Daniel's heterosexual male drag and his brother's gay lifestyle embodies what Lisa Duggan calls "homonormativity," which is a "politics that does not

[28] Victoria Flanagan, *Into the Closet: Cross-dressing and the Gendered Body in Children's Literature and Film* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 177.

contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustain them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency."[29] Rather than giving equality to sexual minorities, the film embraces "a superficial 'multiculturalism' compatible with the global aspirations of U.S. business interests."[30] Daniel and the film welcome cross-dressing as long as it is lucrative. In spite of the movie's apparent inclusion of queerness—which is embodied by Daniel's cross-dressing and his friendly relationship with his gay brother and his partner, who are make-up artists—it reinforces the conservative stereotype that queerness is incompatible with fatherhood; Daniel's cross-dressing looks heroic in the film because he is subjected to the risk of being judged as queer and abnormal.[31]

Daniel's sexual anxiety is intertwined with his anxiety about race and class. By projecting Daniel's lifestyle from the standpoint of the woman, the movie addresses white middle-class men's anxiety of being marked as "others": it is the camera's identification with Miranda's voyeuristic gaze that makes Daniel anxious. When Miranda visits Daniel's new apartment for the first time after the custody rights trial to pick up her kids, she watches his messy room and ironically calls it "charming." In reply, Daniel tells her that he is going for the "refugee motif," suggesting that he is expelled from his home like a refugee; his "refugee" status works as melodramatic loss of home and innocence. Daniel's new lifestyle is actually far from that of refugees'; nevertheless, Daniel feels as if his capacity to be invisible—a marker of "unmarked men," to borrow from Sally Robinson—is questioned.[32] The movie evokes white middle-class

[29] Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality?* 50.
[30] Ibid, 44.
[31] Flanagan, *Into the Closet*, 197.
[32] Sally Robinson, *Marked Men: White Masculinity in Crisis* (New York: Columbia UP, 2000),

men's anxiety that they become one of the marked men who are constantly watched and deemed suspicious. For Daniel, the divorce means not only the loss of custody rights but going down the economic ladder. Middle-class lifestyle has worked as a marker of whiteness in the United States; however, Daniel's financial instability blurs the borderline between unmarked and marked men. Indeed, while Miranda's house is located in the affluent uptown neighborhood, Daniel finds his new apartment in the downtown area where racial minorities live. Not unlike Murray, *Mrs. Doubtfire* produces the resentment of white middle-class men that they might fall into the underclass and be lumped together with racial others while their ex-wives alone keep the privileged status of white middle-class.

Daniel's anxiety about his loss of racial privilege is coupled with bitterness about Miranda's incorporation of ethnic culture as a middle-class consumer. Hastily adding to his comment about the "refugee motif," Daniel states: "But look at you! This lovely *Dances with Wolves* motif. What's your Indian name. Shops with a Fist?" Daniel is both admiring and making a fun of Miranda's Indian-looking tapestry shirt; in this movie Daniel always wears the flannel shirt, which works as a symbol of the rugged American man. By slightly changing the Indian name used in the popular movie *Dances with Wolves* (Costner 1990), Daniel cynically suggests Miranda's power as a female consumer.[33] In Daniel's stereotyped understanding, only white women are entitled to appropriate ethnic culture as consumers, while a white middle-class man like Daniel is constantly afraid of being put into the position of racial minorities; for Daniel, Miranda is far from expelled from her home because her faux Indian status is superficial while

1-4.

[33] For white middle-class women's consumption of ethnic culture at the turn of the twentieth century, see Kristin L. Hoganson, *Consumers' Imperium: The Global Production of American Domesticity, 1865-1920* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina UP, 2007).

his faux refugee status is viscerally felt. In other words, while Miranda domesticates ethnic culture and turns it into a middle-class commodity, Daniel's lifestyle is undomesticated and thus marked as suspicious. This is not to say, though, that Daniel reacts against the female power of consumerism; in the age of neoliberalism which "transmogrifies every human domain and endeavor, along with humans themselves, according to a specific image of the economic," Daniel eases his anxiety by appropriating the female power of consumerism, as I examine later.[34]

Constantly monitored by others, Daniel's urban apartment is turned into a laboratory of neoliberal lifestyle makeover, which offers a spectacle of a white middle-class father's self-transformation. Before Miranda enters Daniel's apartment, Daniel eats takeout Chinese food with his children. In this scene, the camera highlights Daniel's economic predicament by showing the mess of the room in close-up—unpacked cardboard boxes full of random items, unfinished plates and Styrofoam cups left on the table, and so on—and implicitly contrasting it with gorgeous decoration in Miranda's house. While the camera moves its focus on Daniel and his children, Daniel, with weak smile on his face, says "I know the place doesn't look like much now, but it'll be okay. How do you like it?" His younger daughter and son reply "nice" and "it's okay," but his older daughter disparagingly says "detestable." This looks like a typical beginning of makeover TV program in which personal shortcomings of the subject of makeover are pointed out by his/her family members in humiliating detail.[35] Resonating with the emergent narrative of makeover, *Mrs. Doubtfire* displays Daniel's "before"-lifestyle as detestable, which has to be rectified by his own choice. As a savvy lifestyle expert, Daniel makes over Miranda's home; at

[34] Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution.* (New York: Zone Books, 2015), 10.
[35] Tania Lewis, *Smart Living: Lifestyle Media and Popular Expertise* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 68.

the same time, in the process of doing that, Daniel makes over himself and is reborn as a nurturing father. However, unlike most makeover TV programs, *Mrs. Doubtfire* does not represent Daniel's self-makeover as a linear process in which the "after"-self abandons his "before"-self and embraces his new identity. Rather, as next section illustrates, Daniel's self-makeover is full of ambiguity; Daniel's disguise is a medium through which his virtue as a white middle-class father—which is also a despised element of his "before"-self—is underscored.

A White Middle-class Father's (In)Visibility and Melodramatic Comedy

Sandwiched by two courtroom scenes, Daniel's cross-dressing is not only comical but pathetic.[36] Daniel wants to unveil the mask of Mrs. Doubtfire and be himself, but he cannot stay with his children without the mask; this identity crisis makes the movie both funny and pathetic because Daniel is constantly suffering in his disguised status as a woman. When Daniel's children tell him they miss their dad, Mrs. Doubtfire whispers in the undisguised voice only the audience can hear: "I'm here, guys . . . In some form." Whispering in his real voice, Daniel's statement sounds more pathetic and melodramatic than funny. As Neale discusses, melodrama's sentimental power stems from "discrepancies between the knowledge and point of view of the spectator and the knowledge and points of view of the characters."[37] With the saccharine instrumental music played in the background, Daniel's monologue suggests that he has a hard time repressing his identity as a white middle-class father and his true feeling for his children.

[36] As Stella Bruzzi puts it, "[the] importance of the film's often manic oscillation between the character in and out of disguise is only partly to generate laughter; the device also functions as moral ballst, a reminder of the continued existence of the 'real' person under the complicating make-up." Bruzzi, *Undressing Cinema*, 157.
[37] Neale, "Melodrama and Tears," 7.

The subject of true feeling in *Mrs. Doubtfire* is a white middle-class father, even if—or rather, precisely because—he is in disguise.

The movie's melodramatic victimization of a white middle-class father stems from the reinforced sexual hierarchy between men and women. As literary critic Victoria Flanagan discusses, Daniel constantly feels humiliated while he plays the role of an old woman: "[the] wretched, abject nature of femininity is confirmed by the male characters' universal dismay at the very notion of cross-dressing, their continually expressed shock at the way they are perceived and treated when dressed as females, and their relief at finally abandoning their disguise."[38] For example, while dressed as Mrs. Doubtfire, Daniel curses that he would kill "the misogynistic bastard that invented heels," complaining in his own voice how they hurt his back. For Daniel, feminization is painful and humiliating; while Daniel sympathizes with women to some extent and appropriates feminism, his masculine vocabulary and voice, which is represented as an embodiment of his "true feeling," reconfirm his true identity and emotion as a white middle-class father.[39] Thus, no matter how Daniel is critical of "the misogynistic bastard that invented heels," he is very misogynistic; he can be sympathetic with women as long as they do not violate his privilege as a white middle-class father, that is, as long as women are domesticated; but once women enter into the public sphere—like Miranda and the female social worker do—Daniel feels as if he were assaulted.

Mrs. Doubtfire is funny and pathetic at the same time because it makes fun of a white middle-class father who is losing his sexual privilege: the movie effectively addresses Daniel's

[38] Flanagan, *Into the Closet*, 177.
[39] Ibid, 177. See also Barnett, "'Any Closer and You'd Be Mom,' 33.

sexual anxiety by turning Daniel into a feminine body to be looked at. While cross-dressed as Mrs. Doubtfire, Daniel takes a bus to go home. Daniel's use of public transportation suggests his loss of privacy; he is looked at by the bus driver twice in the movie. Comical laughter and melodramatic suffering are intermingled here because a white middle-class man's emasculation is turned into the source of laughter. However, the movie does not leave Daniel humiliated. The second time Daniel is approached by the bus driver, the camera captures the close-up of Mrs. Doubtfire's ridden up skirt and his/her hairy legs: Daniel's body is re-masculated. This image can be seen as a parody of what Laura Mulvey calls the Western cinema's fetishization of the female body.[40] On the one hand, by turning Daniel's body into an object to be looked at, the movie represents the male gaze which emasculates him. On the other hand, the movie parodies such a male gaze by revealing the male body hidden underneath his female disguise. Daniel is not an object of the laughter anymore; rather, the audience laughs at the bus driver, who is not aware of performed femininity. Normalizing the heterosexual male gaze, the film underscores that although men may look at women, men should not look at other men as if they were women.

Daniel's sexual identity intersects with his racial identity; he feels more emasculated when he is watched by racial others. Daniel is seen as "queer" and laughed at by Asian-looking brothers/sisters whose sexes are unclear; while Daniel puts on the female bodysuit, the film cuts to a middle shot of Asian brothers/sisters who look at Daniel's (un)dressing from the next apartment and the audience hears them giggle. Then, when Daniel turns around, the camera cuts to a middle shot of surprised faces of Asian neighbors. Peeped at by ethnic minorities who have themselves a "queer" appearance, Daniel's self-esteem as a white middle-class man is

[40] Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *Screen* 16 (1975), 6-18. See also Flanagan, *Into the Closet*, 195.

undermined when they call him “sick.” All the borderlines white middle-class men have naturalized are blurred in this scene: whiteness and racial otherness, masculinity and queerness, and adulthood and childhood. This scene is indeed funny; Daniel needs to change his costumes very quickly to “save his face” for Mrs. Sellner, the social worker who happens to visit his apartment while he is cross-dressed as Mrs. Doubtfire. Nevertheless, the audience might also feel pity for Daniel—especially if he is a white man—because by constantly seeing shots of Daniel watched by racial and sexual others, the audience feels as if Daniel were emasculated; in melodrama, humiliation is turned into a source of pathetic power which invites the audience’s identification with the protagonist who endures the pain and suffering.

Daniel’s “queer” lifestyle as an object of laughter

Paradoxically, the film reinforces the invisibility of whiteness and retrieves the space of privacy by exposing a white middle-class father’s queer body to the gaze of racial and sexual others. Daniel’s lack of privacy illuminates the white middle-class men’s anxiety about moving into the downtown area where his unmarked identity is questioned; humiliated by racial and sexual others as “queer,” Daniel loses the sense of home in this scene. He never feels at ease in the downtown apartment where he is watched and laughed at by racial others, while he feels the

sense of home—that his privacy is fully protected—in his uptown house.[41] Daniel's purported status as a homeless man stems from the lack of physical and emotional barriers against racial others. Throughout the movie, Daniel rebuilds such barriers by making a jest of racial and sexual others who only see the surface of things; Daniel is constantly gazed and monitored by others, but he is still invisible.[42]

Daniel's fear of being monitored by the female social worker addresses white middle-class fathers' typical resentment against the feminized state's invasion of privacy in the era of neoliberalism. As a court liaison worker, Mrs. Sellner has the power to convince the judge whether he should give custody rights to Daniel. When she enters Daniel's new apartment, the camera shows the details of his messy apartment in a long shot, as if to help her scrutinize his lifestyle; by suturing the female social worker's viewpoint to Daniel's viewpoint on which the movie centers, the movie evokes white middle-class man's anxiety of being marked as underclass. However, questioning such a monitoring power given to the female social worker, the movie attacks the personality of Mrs. Sellner. Like the blank-faced judge, Mrs. Sellner is represented as an antithesis of Mrs. Doubtfire in spite of their similar appearances—a humorless, no-nonsense old lady who has no empathy for a family man who is forcefully separated from his children.[43] Mrs. Sellner's lack of emotion—her facial expression does not change at all throughout the movie, even when Daniel's funny spot-on impersonations of famous actors make

[41] Ehrenreich, *Fear of Falling*, 42-43.
[42] See Richard Dyer, *White* (New York: Routledge, 1997) for the analysis of white men's invisibility.
[43] Freeman and Valentine, "Through the Eyes of Hollywood: Images of Social Workers in Film," 155.

the audience giggle—is counterposed with Daniel's rich emotions, which make him look more humane. As such, Mrs. Sellner's callousness reinforces the stereotype that the bureaucratic big government is not interested in white middle-class father's gut emotions.

Mrs. Doubtfire does not simply address the fear and resentment of white middle-class fathers toward the social worker; it also deflects their anger by turning the social worker into an object of mockery. In other words, the movie recuperates white middle-class father's power to watch others, who become the butt of humor. The movie represents Mrs. Sellner as a prim old miss who is silly enough to be deceived by Daniel when he accidently loses the mask of Mrs. Doubtfire and puts the icing on the cake on his face as the "nightly meringue mask"; not understanding the joke of pie in the face, Mrs. Sellner tries the icing beauty regimen herself. The movie's comical portrait of the social worker shows how white middle-class fathers are both afraid of and ridicule the law and bureaucracy, which are characterized by their lack of melodramatic emotion; the moral battle is fought not with reason but with feeling. Daniel is not simply an object of laughter: the movie restores the power of a white middle-class father by making a jest of others. As such, the movie intermixes comedy and melodrama. Daniel's melodramatic suffering as a white middle-class father is in constant tension with being laughed at by and laughing at racial and sexual others. To put it differently, the tension between melodrama and comedy in *Mrs. Doubtfire* can be also understood as a "dialectic of pathos and action."[44] *Mrs. Doubtfire*'s comical elements partly stem from a white middle-class father's lament of his loss of power. Yet, more importantly, in this movie the laughter is used to dispel

[44] Linda Williams, "Melodrama Revisited," ed. Nick Browne, *Refiguring American Film Genres: History and Theory* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1998), 42.

his suffering and rescue from the threat of emasculation; Daniel becomes a subject of action and reasserts his masculinity by making fun of others.

While Ted Kramer's silence underpins the melodramatic pathos of *Kramer vs. Kramer*, Daniel is never silent in *Mrs. Doubtfire*: he is a voice-over artist, after all. In other words, Daniel has freedom to become somebody else, even if temporarily. He has an obsession with his identity as a white middle-class man, but that obsession is paradoxically reinforced by imitating and making fun of sexual and racial others—not unlike in the case of black minstrelsy. In his seminal study about black minstrelsy, Eric Lott argues that the minstrel show polices racial and sexual boundaries by evoking and containing the threat that white men are castrated by black men.[45] Likewise, Daniel enacts the fantasy of domesticated and undomesticated workers to dispel the fear of castration. Not to mention his disguise as an old lady, Daniel mimics and makes fun of others several times in the movie; when Miranda puts her personal ads for a housekeeper on the newspaper, Daniel secretly changes the phone numbers for her ads, and harasses her by making prank-calls. Daniel appropriates the stereotypes of unreliable maids in doing so: a delinquent youth who habitually spanks children, a transsexual woman, and a Mexican-ish immigrant who cannot speak English at all. By creating the illusion of irresponsible and untamed/untamable housekeepers who deviate from the norm of race and sexuality, Daniel instills Miranda a belief that the market of domestic workers is full of danger; only white middle-class fathers, with the mask of domesticated Victorian housekeeper, are sympathetic with children and thus reliable.

While the movie as a whole shows the successful domestication of a white middle-class father, Daniel's impersonation as untamed domestic workers suggests who is not tamable. As

[45] Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Black Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford UP, 1993).

Barbara Ehrenreich argues in *Fear of Falling,* American middle-class women typically "embraced a domestic ethic that upheld housework and childraising as labor too important, too challenging, to be left to a member of the lower class"; "fear of falling" is expressed as fear of a home invasion by undomesticated others.[46] Moreover, secretly afraid of falling into the underclass himself, Daniel restores his damaged self-esteem as a white middle-class man by marking how his domesticity is different from that of racial and sexual others. Daniel's "fear of falling" can be dispelled only when he comically evokes the fear of his home being invaded by others; Daniel's identity as a white middle-class father owes much to the denigration of (un)domestic workers. As Amy Kaplan discusses concerning the imperial discourse of domesticity in the nineteenth century, "the capacity for domesticity becomes an innate defining characteristic of the Anglo-Saxon race."[47] Likewise, whiteness and domesticity are inseparable in *Mrs. Doubtfire*; a white middle-class father is a guardian of American families, which are threatened by the anarchy of undomesticated domestic workers.

Threatened by the nightmarish images of untamed domestic workers, Miranda jumps to white middle-class domesticity offered by Mrs. Doubtfire. Mrs. Doubtfire is more than a hired housekeeper: she, too, is a savvy lifestyle expert whose individual choices (re)produce a middle-class lifestyle. Miranda's face is relieved when Mrs. Doubtfire introduces herself in a sophisticated manner, with quasi-British accent. Daniel/Mrs. Doubtfire impresses Miranda by inventing her European origin: she states that she has worked for the "Smythe family of Elbourne, England. That's Smythe, not Smith, dear." Mrs. Doubtfire is an immigrant as well as other domestic workers whose voices Daniel performs, but she is the "right" immigrant because

[46] Ehrenreich, *Fear of Falling*, 39.
[47] Amy Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2002), 39.

she is white and nicely domesticated. Miranda trusts her very quickly because Mrs. Doubtfire's middle-class taste matches with her own. As Stephanie Coontz argues, the romanticized fantasy of the Victorian family often conceals the complicated and contradictory reality of American families; Daniel and Miranda embrace the Victorian domesticity offered by Mrs. Doubtfire because its nostalgia eases their painful anxiety about the collapse of the family.[48]

By playing the role of Mrs. Doubtfire, Daniel allays his anxiety about not only class but sexuality. Mrs. Doubtfire embodies the resuscitated fantasy of Victorian womanhood: a woman who always looks to the best interest of children and submits to patriarchy.[49] No matter how such an ideal is far from the reality of Victorian women who exercised certain kinds of agency in their homes, Daniel creates an illusion that "back then"—before feminism inculcates a sense of independence in women—it was natural that men controlled women.[50] When Miranda asks Mrs. Doubtfire's advice on her new boyfriend Stu, Mrs. Doubtfire tells her that she has had no desire for men after her husband passed away; Mrs. Doubtfire's motto is "lifelong celibacy" when out of wedlock. Daniel's embrace of the cult of female purity partly stems from his jealousy of Stu, but more importantly, Mrs. Doubtfire's alleged celibacy mirrors Daniel's unfulfilled desire for a prudish and submissive woman; Mrs. Doubtfire is a fictional character through which Daniel

---

[48] Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 65-67.

[49] Discussing the similarities between *Mrs. Doubtfire* and *East Lynne*, a Victorian novel in which the mother returns home in disguise as a British governess, Karen M. Odden states that *Mrs. Doubtfire* is "Victorian in its sensibilities and concerns." Karen M. Odden, "Re-Visioning the 'Vision from a Fairer World Than His': Women, Creativity, and Work in *East Lynne* and *Mrs. Doubtfire*." Eds. Diane Long Hoeveler and Donna Decker Schuster, *Women's Literary Creativity and the Female Body* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), 122.

[50] Coontz, *The Way We Never Were*; Nancy F. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Women's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1997).

projects his own fantasy about womanhood.[51] This is not to say, though, Daniel himself aims for lifelong celibacy and represses his sexual interest; the film displays Daniel's typically masculine gaze at young attractive women in the middle of his childrearing duties, and Daniel uses vulgar sexual language about women to harass Stu, as I discuss later. In short, Daniel's impersonation reinforces the sexual boundary between men and women, and the mask of Mrs. Doubtfire works as a complicated and contradictory signifier. On the one hand, Mrs. Doubtfire veils a white middle-class father's vulgar heterosexual desire and sexual double standard in the disguise of a prudish old lady; on the other hand, resuscitating the ghost of the Victorian cult of female purity, Mrs. Doubtfire enacts Daniel's selfish desire to control women's sexuality.

Victorian motherhood is outdated in the late twentieth century; nevertheless, such a fantasy—that men should exert sexual control over women—plays a significant part in evoking nostalgia in the white middle-class father's melodramatic psyche which reasserts his moral authority. Drawing on the convention of "melodrama's profound conservatism," as Williams puts it, Daniel tries to retrieve the melodramatic space of maternal innocence by reviving the ghost of Victorian domesticity.[52]

More importantly, though, the film's nostalgia and innocence are appropriated by fatherhood. The cult of Victorian domesticity represented by Mrs. Doubtfire works as a metonymical sign of a white middle-class father's hidden virtue; as Brooks argues, "melodrama . . . has recourse to non-verbal means of expressing its meanings. Words . . . appear to be not wholly adequate to the representation of meanings, and the melodramatic message must be formulated through other registers of sign."[53] *Mrs. Doubtfire* does not simply retrieve the

[51] See Bruzzi, *Undressing Cinema*, 162.
[52] Williams, "Melodrama Revisited," 65.
[53] Brooks, *Melodramatic Imagination*, 56.

space of maternal innocence; rather, as I discuss in the next section, it invents the origin of paternal innocence by inculcating the ethos of market values and consumerism in the image of the Victorian mother. In the age of neoliberalism, Daniel looks innocent because he becomes financially independent; isolation from the market is not a marker of innocence anymore. Mrs. Doubtfire is not just a Victorian housekeeper but an entrepreneurial subject whose educational business attends to Daniel's paternal virtue of juggling work and family.

However, this is not to say that Daniel smoothly transforms himself into a domesticated housekeeper. Rather, the movie comically shows the painful process of a white middle-class man's domestication; Daniel's identity as a white middle-class man is negotiated with his new persona of a domesticated housekeeper. As in *Kramer vs. Kramer*, *Mrs. Doubtfire* uses the scene of cooking to illustrate Daniel's confusion in crossing the borderline of gender and class. When he is asked to serve dinner on the first day of his housekeeping, Daniel tries to make gorgeous plates out of a cooking book. In this scene Daniel's face is clouded by steam rising from the pot, which emphasizes Daniel's confusion and frustration. Daniel messes up everything in this scene: he puts too much basil on the grilled salmon, and tips over the pot with boiled water (like Ted Kramer does in the first French toast scene). Moreover, Daniel's lack of domesticity is demonstrated by a shot of his fake-breasts on fire.[54] Exposing Daniel's secret contempt for motherhood and the female body, this image clearly suggests the fragility of Daniel's impersonation as a middle-class, domesticated woman: Daniel simultaneously wants to and does not want to be Mrs. Doubtfire. On the one hand, Daniel's embodiment of a domesticated housekeeper fulfills his melodramatic desire of retrieving the maternal space of innocence. On

[54] The audience can find a similar image when Daniel accidentally drops the mask of Mrs. Doubtfire from his apartment and the truck runs over it. The flattened mask shows the precarity of Daniel's domesticity.

the other hand, though, Daniel's cross-dressing also means his disembodiment of masculine identity; the film constantly elaborates on the tension between being innocent and powerless and being masculine and virile.

Mrs. Doubtfire on fire

Daniel's Makeover as an Entrepreneur

The persona of Mrs. Doubtfire also stems from Daniel's embrace of neoliberal entrepreneurship. Daniel disobeys the order of his bosses and chooses his jobs; becoming "an entrepreneur of himself," Daniel maximizes his human capital and sells himself to the market.[55] In spite of Daniel's economic hardship, the new class marker of entrepreneurship eases his anxiety in the age of neoliberalism; his career change suggests how "the professional middle class is more resilient than those below it."[56] When Daniel loses his job as a voiceover artist, he finds a new position in a TV studio. However, his new job is far from creative: his new boss orders him to box and ship movies, which epitomizes the distinction between the creative class

[55] Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the College de France 1978-1979,* 226.
[56] Ehrenreich, *Fear of Falling*, 208.

and the service class.[57] Daniel's new position as an unskilled worker humiliates him; not an expert anymore, his anxiety of falling into the underclass looms larger. Then, Daniel invents the persona of Mrs. Doubtfire; a devoted Victorian housekeeper is a key figure to satisfy his desire to stay with his children, but at the same time it helps him wipe out the humiliation he undergoes when he is forced to work as an unskilled labor. While workers are interchangeable and disposable at his new workplace, only Daniel can play the role of Mrs. Doubtfire. Under the mask of Mrs. Doubtfire is hidden a white middle-class man's bitter resentment that he is discarded from both his home and workplace; by inventing the character of Mrs. Doubtfire, he returns to the place—or, reconquers the space—he thinks he deserves.

Contrasting Daniel's humiliation at his workplaces with Miranda's status as a successful career woman, Daniel's frustration about his job is gendered. Grumbling to Miranda "you chose the career" and "you spend so much time with those corporate clones you used to despise," Daniel blames and envies Miranda's status as a career woman; it is as if she has usurped Daniel's role as a breadwinner. Judging from the name of the company (Gregory, Henderson and Hillard), Miranda Hillard might be one of the founders and/or executives of the company. As film critic Yvonne Tasker argues, from the standpoint of Daniel, it is Miranda that is cross-dressed; when Miranda first appears in the movie, "[her] costume, a tailored black trouser suit with white blouse styled to resemble a waistcoat, echoes the familiar cross-dressed image of male evening wear, an image which bears associations of social power."[58] The contrast between the white middle-class men's loss of job (or the anxiety about the menial labor) and career women's

[57] Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class: And How It's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community, and Everyday Life* (New York: Basic Books, 2003). See also Ehrenreich, *Fear of Falling*.
[58] Yvonne Tasker, *Working Girls*, 34.

creative job is similar to the economic disparity between the Kramers. Again, the stereotype of a career women's success attests to white middle-class men's anxiety that they might lose their position because of women.

Daniel feels as if Miranda violates the borderline between the market and domesticity: Daniel resents how Miranda abandons her domestic duties while appropriating and commodifying the culture of Victorian domesticity. Miranda's business-oriented lifestyle is incongruent with the Victorian lifestyle she offers as a businessperson; she never cooks, and is never at home to take care of children. She is an interior designer, and her inspiration as a designer often comes from the nineteenth-century Victorian style. The movie cynically shows Miranda's inconsistency as a woman in the sequence of her reunion with Stu. This sequence starts from the close-up image of an elegant china cup which is filled with cappuccino, suggesting her admiration of a Victorian lifestyle. Miranda sips it, but cappuccino's foam is left above her lips. As literary critic Karen M. Odden points out, it looks like the moustache: "Miranda . . . is seen appropriating the male moustache, looking silly doing so, and being corrected by Stu."[59] Normalizing the male gaze, the movie punishes a career woman's masculine ambition by making her into an object to be watched and laughed at. Miranda is more business-minded than Stu, who looks at Miranda while she is showing her sketches of Victorian interior she proposes. Stu's masculine gaze questions her status as a career woman; Stu interrupts Miranda's business talk several times and talks about their private history. Stu does not take her seriously as a business partner; for Stu, Miranda is just a prospective sexual partner.

[59] Odden, "Re-visioning the 'vision from a Fairer World Than His': Women, Creativity, and Work in East Lynne and Mrs. Doubtfire," 129.

Daniel's class anxiety is also reinforced by his resentment toward the new type of the middle-class lifestyle embodied by his love rival, Stu.[60] Daniel's desire of retrieving the innocent Victorian home is disturbed by Stu: as an entrepreneur, he restores an old Victorian mansion and turns it into a "five hundred dollar a night B&B." In the age of neoliberalism, Stu's success in the marketplace evokes anxiety that the traditional American home has been taken over by the market economy. As such, the movie's melodramatic emotion is underpinned by the Manichean moral conflict between not only a family man and a career woman but an outdated man and an updated man. Daniel is seen as a victim because he is assaulted by the new class of men when, to borrow from Ehrenreich, "[for] the first time in postwar America, a middle-level income no longer guaranteed what we have come to think of as a middle-class lifestyle."[61]

Daniel's class resentment is represented as his sexual emasculation. By projecting his fear of emasculation onto a yuppie-like guy, Daniel restores his rugged masculinity.[62] This is most evident in the scene Daniel breaks off the hood ornament of Stu's Mercedes. While Daniel drives an old shabby station wagon, Stu's Mercedes works as the symbol of yuppie consumerism. Vandalizing an expensive car, Daniel symbolically breaks off Stu's genitals. Daniel humiliates and emasculates Stu because he constantly feels humiliated by the new class of man. Mrs.

---

[60] Stu is played by Pierce Brosnan, who, "only one year later, as the new James Bond, came to symbolize the compatibility of masculinity, ornamentality, and consumerism through his seductive advertisements for watches, cars, and other male necessities." Elisabeth Krimmer, "Nobody Wants to Be a Man Anymore? Cross-dressing in American Movies of the 90s." eds. Russell West and Frank Lay, *Subverting Masculinity: Hegemonic and Alternative Versions of Masculinity in Contemporary Culture* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2001), 34.

[61] Ehrenreich, *Fear of Falling*, 205.

[62] The definition of yuppies is mostly based on the cultural stereotype rather than a demographic category. According to Ehrenreich, the stereotypical yuppie "was about thirty in 1984," and Stu might be a little older than that; nevertheless, Stu embodies some of the most emblematic features of the yuppie lifestyle: embrace of a consumer binge, fitness as a marker of self-investment, and an entrepreneurial profession. Ehrenreich, *Fear of Falling*, 198.

Doubtfire ridicules Stu with her comment on the hood ornament: "they say a man who has to buy a big car like that's trying to compensate for smaller genitals." Daniel suggests here that possessing a foreign car is feminine; by feminizing the yuppie lifestyle, cross-dressed Daniel shows who is a true man.[63]

Daniel and Stu's class conflict is also addressed by the difference between their bodies. Stu makes over not only an old mansion but his body; his careful investment in his body works as an asset for the new middle-class lifestyle. As Ehrenreich puts it, "[being] fit in the fullest sense was a proof of having money and, beyond that, almost certain proof that one had not earned that money through manual labor or muscular exertion."[64] The movie shows his body as a spectacle: when Stu invites the Hillards to a gorgeous members-only pool, the camera first displays Stu's muscular body with chest hair in a medium close-up and then shows him perform a triple flip from the diving board. Stu's body in action is the object of admiration in this sequence. While Mrs. Doubtfire ironically tells Natalie that "not everyone has their own personal trainer" and "that's called liposuction" when Natalie compares Stu's tummy with her father's; suggesting that Stu's body is made over by the cosmetic surgery, Daniel marks his body as feminine. The movie, then, offers different kinds of bodily spectacle: a yuppie man's made-over body and a lower-middle-class man's natural body, which is covered by the costume of a fat old woman and made into an object to be laughed at. On the one hand, Daniel ridicules Stu's self-investment in his body when cynically stating "not a single body like that exists in nature." Daniel considers himself as the real man while he marks Stu as an artificial and effeminate yuppie. On the other hand, his irony about Stu's body boomerangs on him because obviously,

[63] Bruzzi, *Undressing Cinema*, 162.
[64] Ehrenreich, *Fear of Falling*, 235-236.

Mrs. Doubtfire's body does not "exist in nature" either. Daniel and Stu look very different, but in fact, they are not: in both cases, their power stems from the makeover lifestyles.

In spite of the contrast between Daniel's rugged masculinity and Stu's yuppie masculinity, Daniel's masculinity is far from conventional. Daniel remakes his masculinity in the movie; he nullifies the distinction between work and home. Mrs. Doubtfire is not only an ideal housekeeper but also a dream job for white middle-class father because it realizes his unfulfilled desire of turning the workplace into home. Daniel's situation might not seem so novel because, after all, hired housekeepers in the United States have always experienced the dilemma of juggling work and family. Nevertheless, Daniel's choice is still very different from other domestic workers' because he takes care of his own children while hired as a housekeeper. In reality, most hired housekeepers are immigrants, and some of them go back and forth between their countries of origin to take care of their families and provide enough money to sustain their families.[65] While these women of color are forced to make ends meet by keeping other families' houses, Daniel makes a choice to work as a housekeeper. Also, in reality, most middle-class stay-at-home homemakers are unpaid when they keep house. These two dilemmas are very different, but they stem from the same root: the separation of motherhood from the marketplace. Daniel solves these two dilemmas at the same time, by making a choice to intertwine his fatherhood with the marketplace, while motherhood is and remains separated from the marketplace. Daniel makes Miranda pay for her gender nonconformity by paying him to do what she and all women are supposed to do for free.

---

[65] Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, *Children of Global Migration: Transnational Families and Gendered Woes* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2005); Eds. Barbara Ehrenreich and Arlie Russel Hochschild, *Global Woman: Nannies, Maids, and Sex Workers in the New Economy* (London: Granta Books, 2003)

However, Daniel does not simply make a business out of his fatherhood. Daniel turns himself into a disciplined caretaker when he performs the identity of a Victorian housekeeper. In other words, he professionalizes the education of children, while his investment in his children's future is distinguished from the "hyper-consumer lifestyle of the yuppie."[66] At the beginning of the movie, Daniel is not very concerned about his children's future; to borrow from Ehrenreich, he epitomizes a "present-oriented person" who is stereotypically marked as an underclass.[67] Daniel is hedonistic and impulsive: when holding a surprise birthday party for his son, Daniel hires a mobile petting zoo. Daniel and Miranda's nice suburban house is turned into "a wild kingdom," and Daniel and children have a fun time until Miranda furiously comes home, busts the party, and cleans up the mess. In this scene, Daniel's present-oriented mindset is linked with his undomesticated impulse. As I argue at length in the next chapter, the trope of an undomesticated animal suggests how Daniel before his makeover is far from homo oeconomicus. Like the animals that invade Miranda's and her neighbor's nice houses, Daniel is untamable; indeed, when a police officer asks Miranda if she knows it's illegal to possess barnyard animals in a residential area, Miranda answers: "what if you're married to one?" As such, the movie clearly demonstrates that one and the same figure—the white father—can both produce and vandalize middle-class domesticity. Also, it is equally important that Daniel is subtly racialized in this scene; the film's use of hip-hop music and Daniel's appropriation of African American lexicon reinforce the stereotype of African Americans as undomesticated. In short, he is represented as undomesticated because he does not act "white." Daniel's marginal position in the

[66] Barnett, "'Any Closer and You'd Be Mom,' 24. See also Odden, "Re-visioning the 'vision from a Fairer World Than His': Women, Creativity, and Work in East Lynne and Mrs. Doubtfire," 140.
[67] Ehrenreich, *Fear of Falling*, 54.

white middle-class family is indicated by his appropriation of underclass, African American, and undomesticated lifestyles, which makes a stark contrast with the Victorian domesticity he embodies in the latter half of the movie.

In this scene, Daniel is also represented as an immature adult who is too permissive with his children to teach them proper discipline. Daniel is more childish than his children; as Ehrenreich argues, a present-oriented person is often deemed to be a child.[68] On the one hand, a childlike white middle-class man works as a melodramatic icon of innocence. Daniel is a fun father who always thinks about amusing his children, and the movie laments how such innocence is being lost. On the other hand, the movie threatens white middle-class men by showing how a spoiled and undomesticated father can vandalize his own private property. In other words, this scene shows the peril of innocence, on which the melodramatic convention of the movie depends. Daniel's love for children shows his innocence, but the movie also questions such innocence by drawing on the discourse of permissiveness. In this sense, *Mrs. Doubtfire* is not only nostalgic: notwithstanding Williams' discussion that "[this] quest, not for the new but for the old space of innocence, is the fundamental reason for melodrama's profound conservatism," *Mrs. Doubtfire* imagines the new space of innocence in which a white middle-class father's investment in children's education marks his moral redemption.[69] As Katie Barnett suggests in her discussion of Robin Williams' star persona as a man-child, "beneath [the] repeated portrayal of [Williams'] immaturity and frivolity, perhaps nowhere better acknowledged than in Williams' depiction of the original boy who never grew up, Peter Pan, there lies a strong inclination toward the paternal role as a source of redemption and survival."[70]

---

[68] Ehrenreich, *Fear of Falling*, 51.
[69] Williams, "Melodrama Revised," 65.
[70] Barnett, "'Any Closer and You'd Be Mom,' 23.

Daniel's transformation into a disciplined father/housekeeper shows white middle-class men's fear of permissiveness; by performing Victorian motherhood, Daniel domesticates his children and reproduces a middle-class lifestyle.[71] On the first day of his housekeeping job, Mrs. Doubtfire tosses the TV remote control into a fish tank to stop his children from watching and makes them work on their homework. Declaring "when [he is] in charge, you will follow a schedule. Those who do not follow the schedule will be punished," Daniel turns himself into a rigid and disciplined Victorian mother who is obsessed with children's education, no matter how his kids dislike such disciplinary education.[72] Daniel further teaches the lesson about the significance of education by punishing his children by assigning the "manual labor" of cleaning the house when they refuse to do homework. In the midst of neoliberal economy, Daniel's use of the term "manual labor" (as well as Lydia's complaint that "this is exploitation") suggests the future of his children if they are not properly disciplined. In this way, Daniel's transformation into a domesticated mother is entangled with his fear of falling into the underclass.

However, this is not to say that Daniel becomes more authoritative when he is cross-dressed. Daniel is certainly domesticated and disciplined when he plays the role of a Victorian housekeeper, but he still is a "fun father." In other words, Daniel turns the housekeeping job into a kind of entertainment. Daniel dances while cleaning the house: to borrow from Lewis, by turning domestic labor into a scene of amusement, the movie reworks housekeeping job "as a site of fun, spectacle, and fantasy lifestyles, distanced from the mundanity of everyday life and the

---

[71] Ehrenreich, *Fear of Falling*, 57-96. Amy Kaplan discusses that children were deemed as "young savages in need of civilizing" under the discourse of Victorian motherhood. See Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire*, 32.

[72] See Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood*, 101-125 for the significance of education in Victorian motherhood.

labours of domesticity."[73] The movie turns the housekeeping duty into a creative job. In one scene, Daniel watches the TV on which Julia Child is instructing how to cook lobster. Child places a lobster into a pot and covers it with a lid. Then, the camera is switched to Mrs. Doubtfire taking a lobster out of the pot. The movie's suturing of the popularized image of Julia Child to Mrs. Doubtfire shows how middle-class lifestyle is distanced from "labors of domesticity" and turned into a consumer's spectacle, as in *Early Autumn*.

Daniel turns Mrs. Doubtfire into a new cultural icon: by blurring the conventional borderline between public and private and education and entertainment, Mrs. Doubtfire embodies the flexibility and creativity which are highly valued in a neoliberal society. As an entrepreneur, Daniel turns Mrs. Doubtfire into a popular TV character who entertains and educates children at the same time; as Tasker discusses, Daniel "makes a spectacle of himself ('Showtime') but also turns that spectacle into professional success."[74] Mrs. Doubtfire is more than a housekeeper; as a hostess of an educational show, she broadens her power of providing cultural capital. Likewise, Daniel does not feel emasculated anymore when he is laughed at: coming out of the closet and unveiling his identity as a white middle-class father, he can make fun of and commodify Mrs. Doubtfire's stereotypical femininity. Daniel can ease his anxiety as a white middle-class man when he finds that he can turn middle-class domesticity into a cultural commodity; as an entrepreneur, Daniel shows how he can merge his private interests with public interests. Mrs. Doubtfire's success as a hostess of TV show is very different from the convention of the family melodrama of the 1950s in which TV represents the consumer culture which traps and suffocates mothers. In *All That Heaven Allows*, there is a famous shot in which the mother's

[73] Lewis, *Smart Living*, 57.
[74] Tasker, *Working Girls*, 34.

face is framed and trapped in a TV screen. In contrast, Daniel/Mrs. Doubtfire is far from trapped in domesticity when she appears on screen: Daniel shows his power as an entrepreneur.

Conclusion

At the end of the movie, Daniel does not suppress his own voice as a white middle-class father anymore even if he is cross-dressed. As Odden discusses, "the man who was a voice-over artist at the beginning of the movie has become the giver of moral lesson to the movie."[75] The movie shows the melodramatic triumph of a white middle-class man's morality; while his improvised voice is rejected by his boss at the beginning of the movie, Daniel's voice finally gives the significance to the images on the screen. As Mrs. Doubtfire, Daniel states from the TV screen:

> You know, some parents get along much better when they don't live together. . . . Just because they don't love each other doesn't mean that they don't love you. There are all sorts of different families, Katie. Some families have one mommy, some families have one daddy . . . But if there's love, dear, those are the ties that bind. And you'll have a family in your heart forever.

Daniel embraces the diversity and flexibility of American families. While Mrs. Doubtfire didactically states the significance of families' diversity, the screen shows the close-up of Miranda who listens seriously to what Mrs. Doubtfire is talking about; Miranda has to be tutored by Daniel about the significance of the family. Daniel finally regains the authority which he had lost at the beginning of the movie. Echoing with the contemporary discourse of the fatherless

[75] Odden, "Re-visioning the 'vision from a Fairer World Than His': Women, Creativity, and Work in East Lynne and Mrs. Doubtfire," 141.

society, the white middle-class nurturing father works as a symbol of the diversity of American families; an authentic remark on the post-nuclear family is made by a single father, not a single mother. Daniel's belief in family diversity is contradictory because, as I have discussed throughout this chapter, his queer disguise as a Victorian housekeeper reinforces the norm of gender roles. Daniel embraces family diversity and appropriates femininity as long as it naturalizes his identity as a white middle-class nurturing father.

The white middle-class father's impersonation of racial and sexual others in *Mrs. Doubtfire* mirrors his anxiety of being a nurturing father; as Ehrenreich argues, "[we] seldom see the 'others' except as projections of our own anxieties or instruments of our own ambitions."[76] Daniel's vocal impersonation as a foreign housekeeper mirrors, to some extent, his rugged masculinity and childishness; he exaggerates the threat of undomesticated others because he is afraid of his lack of domesticity. Similarly, Daniel's ridicule of Mrs. Doubtfire's lifelong celibacy and her primary role as a housekeeper suggests how the white middle-class father secretly resuscitates the fantasy of traditional gender roles, which he criticizes at the end of the movie. Appropriating the cultural identity of racial and sexual others, Daniel sustains the fantasy of white middle-class fathers: unlike racial others, they are not completely undomesticated; unlike sexual others, they are not completely domesticated. Rather than constantly demonstrating Daniel's self-less devotion as a nurturing father, *Mrs.Doubtfire* elucidates the unsolved tensions and fissures of the white middle-class nurturing father.

Mrs. Doubtfire intensifies the white middle-class father's anxiety that was earlier evoked by *Kramer vs. Kramer*: Daniel's melodramatic suffering in the movie stems from his conflict with the mother, the law, and the old type of labor which undermines the value of human capital.

[76] Ehrenreich, *Fear of Falling*, 257.

However, the resentment evoked by *Mrs. Doubtfire* is a little more complicated and entangled with other elements as well: race, sexuality, and globalization. The difference between these two movies suggests how white middle-class fathers became more and more desperate in the late twentieth century to retrieve the power they used to have; the increasing threat of corporate capitalism and the augmented pressure for "political correctness" in the intervening years helped justify the weepy self-pity of white middle-class men. More vocal and outspoken in its reproach and ridicule of racial, class and sexual others, Daniel Hillard's crude language replaces Ted Kramer's silent protest; while *Kramer vs. Kramer* foregrounds the element of silent pathos, *Mrs. Doubtfire* underscores a white middle-class father's comic and sensational action of impersonation.

Chapter Five: Neoliberal Governmentality and the Revision of Melodrama in Raymond Carver's "Jerry and Molly and Sam"

Raymond Carver's short stories focus on the pain and suffering of white middle-class men in the age of neoliberalism. The status of the middle-class became more and more precarious in the late twentieth century as neoliberalism expanded its intangible power with the advent of corporate capitalism and globalization. As Barbara Ehrenreich argues, the middle-class is a slippery category in its definition and entangled with the "fear of falling."[1] In the late twentieth century, white middle-class men experienced deepened "fear of falling" because of neoliberalism's invisibility—the risk is so prevalent that nobody can expect when they would have bad news—and such anxiety and resentment are most conspicuously represented in Carver's stories. As literary critic Ben Harker discusses, Carver's characters have "done the right things, but the right things have not happened for them. They feel this, but do not understand it and have no language or narrative through which to articulate or explain it."[2] Carver's laconic characters do not fully understand why they have to suffer, and the nebulous reason of their lack of social mobility deprives them of their future prospects.

This chapter closely analyzes Carver's story "Jerry and Molly and Sam" (1972). Drawing on the complicated relationship between the protagonist and his dog, this story illustrates the fear and resentment of a white middle-class father and the emergence of neoliberal governmentality. In Carver's pet stories, the protagonists' failure to properly domesticate and care for the animals

[1] Barbara Ehrenreich, *Fear of Falling: The Inner Life of the Middle Class* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1990).
[2] Ben Harker, "'To Be There, Inside, and Not Be There': Raymond Carver and Class," *Textual Practice* 21.4 (2007), 721.

within the household stands in as their inadequate patriarchal authority and their status as white, middle-class men. This chapter particularly focuses on "Jerry and Molly and Sam" because this story attests to the unique conflicts between the white middle-class father and the dog and offers a glimpse into the fundamental unease with which the white middle-class father approaches his familial roles in a neoliberal economic environment. The longing and desire of the white middle-class father for control and affection go unfulfilled and unreciprocated in his connections to the animal other, conjuring the unfathomable distance between his frustrating reality and the utopic dream of nuclear fatherhood as a center of meaning.

On the one hand, this story draws on the melodramatic convention of the Manichean conflict between the victim and the victimizer; in an age of neoliberal insecurity, the protagonist Al sees his dog's anarchy as the last straw. In Carver's pet stories, the lack of harmonious relationship between pets and white middle-class men exacerbates their anxiety in a risk society. In these stories the protagonists try to control their anxiety by neglecting a pet, but they finally find out that either the animal other or their life is not controllable.[3] In "Jerry and Molly and Sam," the dog's anarchy is identified with feminized and racialized dependency, and the protagonist's fear of such anarchy illuminates his secret fear of being dependent on others.

On the other hand, the story criticizes such a melodramatic mindset of a white middle-class father by highlighting the innocence and vulnerability of the dog. This story does not portray the protagonist as a pathetic object whom readers can sympathize with; Al is far from an innocent victim because he victimizes an innocent dog when "humans who live without pets or who treat their pets as a species apart are seen as anomalous and somehow emotionally, psychologically, or

[3] "Neighbors," "What's in Alaska?" "Put Yourself in My Shoes," "What Is It?" "Dummy" are some examples of such stories, although these stories do not necessarily focus on the theme of fatherhood.

morally stunted," to borrow from ethnic studies scholar Heidi J. Nast.[4] Al's attempt to get rid of the dog shows his (mis)internalization of the emergent neoliberal governmentality which promotes the incarceration of racial and animal others.

Going against the tide of the neoliberal therapeutic culture of pet love, Al's choice to abandon the dog resonates with the ideology of infantile citizenship which, according to Lauren Berlant, played a significant part in the melodramatic political and cultural discourse of the late-twentieth-century America. In such a discourse, Al is understood as a victimizer who neglects the truly vulnerable creature. Furthermore, echoing with the anxiety about the fatherless society, the characters in "Jerry and Molly and Sam" question Al's qualification as a white middle-class father. As such, the dog's liminality works as different types of tropes in the story; for Al, the dog is a metaphor of racial others who should be incarcerated, and for others, the dog is a metaphor of innocent children neglected by fathers. Nevertheless, the story finally criticizes such melodramatic projections of human desire by foregrounding the (significant) otherness of the dog at the very end of the story.

Al's fear and resentment against the invisible power of neoliberalism go hand in hand with his embrace of the nostalgic memory of the loyal dogs as a psychological anchor of the family. In "Jerry and Molly and Sam," Al's childhood memory about the loyal dog overlaps with *Lassie Come-Home*, a melodramatic story about the loyal dog that travels hundreds of miles to return home. *Lassie Come-Home* works as a counterpoint of Al's conflict with his non-loyal dog that deprives him of the sense of home; losing his job during Great Depression, the father who owns Lassie is no less insecure than Al, but the loyal dog provides an illusion of home which eases the threat of the unrelenting business world. Furthermore, while Lassie's melodrama underlines the

[4] Heidi J. Nast, "Loving...Whatever: Alienation, Neoliberalism and Pet-Love in the Twenty-First Century." *ACME: An International E-journal for Critical Geographies*, 5.2 (2006), 323.

masculine virtue of endurance and reinforces the homosocial bonds between the father and the son, Al's relationship with his children is exacerbated by the dog's absence. By projecting the fear of a white middle-class man onto the anarchy of the dog and contrasting it with the security the loyal dog once promised in the age of Fordism and nuclear families, "Jerry and Molly and Sam" underlines a white middle-class man's desperate yearning for the melodrama of loyal pets and its lack thereof.

Neoliberal Governmentality and the Animal Other in "Jerry and Molly and Sam"

"Jerry and Molly and Sam" (1972) centers on the melodramatic sentiment of a white middle-class father under the neoliberal economy in which everything is insecure. The protagonist of the story, Al, is in a harsh situation; his company suddenly starts to lay off a large number of workers. The post-Fordist mode of production makes his future unpredictable: "He got along with the right people, all right, but seniority or friendship, either one, didn't mean a damn these days. If your number was up, that was that—and there was nothing anybody could do."[5] Al feels that human connection does not mean anything under the new economy; he is reduced to a number, and nobody pays attention to his individuality. The story introduces the framework of melodrama by presenting the protagonist as a powerless victim who suffers from the neoliberal market economy's relentless dehumanization of workers without any human capital.

As gender historian Nancy F. Cott suggests, in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, the norm of the nuclear family eased the white middle-class fathers' anxiety about the ravages of capitalism.[6] However, as the norm of the nuclear family collapses in the late twentieth century,

[5] Raymond Carver, *Collected Stories* (New York: The Library of America, 2009), 116.
[6] Nancy F. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Women's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1997); see also Christopher Lasch, *Haven in a Heartless World: The Family Besieged* (New York: Basic Books, 1977).

such a psychological anchor becomes unavailable to white middle-class fathers. In "Jerry and Molly and Sam," Al's private life is no more secure than his business; in addition to his alcoholism, his affair with a woman causes unresolved tension between him and his wife Betty. Neither does he have a good relationship with his children, Alex and Mary; unlike other white middle-class fathers I examined in other chapters, Al is the antithesis of a nurturing father. In short, in both the private and public realm, Al is threatened by the neoliberal norm of flexibilization, in Nancy Fraser's words.[7] Living in the "risk society," as Ulrich Beck calls it, Al's work and family are very fragile and unstable: "Al was drifting, and he knew he was drifting, and where it was all going to end he could not guess at. But he was beginning to feel he was losing control over everything."[8]

Not unlike Ted Kramer and Daniel Hillard in *Kramer vs. Kramer* and *Mrs. Doubtfire*, Al loses the familial and economic anchor in the neoliberal world. However, unlike Ted and Daniel, Al has no interest in the entrepreneurial makeover which enhances his human capital. He keeps "drifting" in the story, and rarely makes a choice; and when he makes a choice (of abandoning his dog), it is a wrong choice. While *Kramer vs. Kramer* and *Mrs. Doubtfire* embrace white middle-class fathers' innovative choices which pave the way for their melodramatic moral triumph, "Jerry and Molly and Sam" shows the absence of choice as such for a white middle-class father. In other words, by focusing on the life of those who do not have choices, Carver's story shows how suffocating it is to live in a neoliberal world without any human capital. As Fraser discusses, under the neoliberal/post-Fordist norm of flexibilization, "[a] subject of (market) choice and a consumer services, [an] individual is obligated to enhance her quality of life through her

[7] Nancy Fraser, "From Discipline to Flexibilization? Rereading Foucault in the Shadow of Globalization." *Constellations,* 10.2 (2003), 160-171.
[8] Carver, *Collected Stories*, 117; Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*. Trans. Mark Ritter (London: Sage, 1992).

decisions. In this new 'care of self,' everyone is an expert on herself, responsible for managing her own human capital to maximal effect."[9]

Al's lack of human capital is underscored by the story's laconic style. Written from the viewpoint of the third person narrator who mostly focuses on Al's illogical feelings, Carver's signature use of laconic style and clichéd words goes hand in hand with Al's lack of prospect on his future. David Boxer and Cassandra Phillips discuss: "As its most distinctive, Carver's language is unadorned, and, except for occasional bolts of metaphor, as laconic and unmannered as the outward lives of his characters. He flattens his prose to mirror the flatness of his characters' lives."[10] Underlining the vulnerability of a white middle-class father who loses "control over everything," the story illustrates his failure to manage himself: "He swore at what a weathervane he was, changing this way and that, one moment this, the next moment that."[11] Far from an "expert on himself," Al does not have any specific vision about his future—except that he should get rid of the dog as soon as possible—while "[within] neoliberal rationality, human capital is both our 'is' and our 'ought,'" to borrow from Wendy Brown.[12] Al does not embrace the "ought" but only suffers the "is": unlike Ted Kramer and Daniel Hillard, Al never enjoys a freedom provided by the neoliberal society.

---

[9] Fraser, "From Discipline to Flexibilization?" 168. See also Nikolas Rose, "Governing 'Advanced' Liberal Democracies." Eds. Andrew Barry, Thomas Osborne, and Nikolas Rose, *Foucault and Political Reason: Liberalism, Neoliberalism, and the Rationalities of Government* (Chicago: UP of Chicago, 1996), 57.

[10] David Boxer and Cassandra Phillips, "Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?: Voyeurism, Dissociation, and the Art of Raymond Carver." *The Iowa Review*, 10.1 (1979), 81. See also Harker, "'To Be There, Inside, and Not Be There': Raymond Carver and Class," 721 and Graham Clarke, "Investing the Glimpse: Raymond Carver and the Syntax of Silence." Ed. Graham Clarke, *The New American Writing: Essays on American Literature since 1970* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), 100.

[11] Carver, *Collected Stories*, 127.

[12] Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 36.

As such, "Jerry and Molly and Sam" demonstrates the pain and suffering of a white middle-class father and his "fear of falling" in the age of neoliberalism.[13] Nevertheless, by foregrounding the white middle-class father's resentment against the powerless dog, the story criticizes the framework of melodrama; as literary critic Vanessa Hall puts it, "Carver's stories both participate in and critique narratives of wounded white masculinity."[14] In spite of his fragility, Al tries to believe that his life is not yet completely out of control. He does so by creating a scapegoat: Suzy, a mongrel dog his family keeps. He believes that he can restore order only by abandoning her: "As Al saw it, there was only one solution. He had to get rid of the dog without Betty or the kids finding out about it."[15] Al finds the source of his disorder in his pet, not in the society. Obviously, Suzy does not have anything to do with his unstable position in his workplace; nevertheless, she provides an emotional outlet for the frustration Al feels in the unstable world.

The intertwined relationship between melodrama and neoliberalism in "Jerry and Molly and Sam" can be accounted for by Elisabeth Anker's concept of "orgies of feeling," which is built upon Friedrich Nietzsche's notion. As Anker explains, orgies of feeling names an identifiable source of evil to ameliorate the prolonged sense of helplessness and vulnerability felt in the daily life: "Orgies of feeling 'deaden' dull and protracted experiences of pain by inflicting new pain upon the suffering subject."[16] Orgies of feeling relies upon melodrama's deployment of emotion because "[melodrama's] heightened affects might be appealing to political subjects precisely because those affects offer a way to explain and overcome the protracted pains and 'dull'

---

[13] Barbara Ehrenreich, *Fear of Falling: The Inner Life of the Middle Class* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1990).
[14] Vanessa Hall, "'It All Fell in on Him': Masculinities in Raymond Carver's Short Stories and American Culture during the 1970s and 1980s." *Journal of Men's Studies* 17.2 (2009), 176.
[15] Carver, *Collected Stories*, 116 and 118.
[16] Elisabeth R. Anker, *Orgies of Feeling: Melodrama and the Politics of Freedom* (Durham: Duke UP, 2014), 150.

paralysis in daily lives saturated by myriad and unaccountable forms of power."[17] In "Jerry and Molly and Sam," Al's abandoning of the dog suggests how "confronting a namable, identifiable evil . . . [seems] more achievable than confronting a chaotic and confusing range of structures, networks, and relations of power that affects individuals in different ways."[18] By identifying his dog as the source of disorder, Al refrains from facing complicated forms of neoliberal power whose operations are "so multifaceted and circuitous that it would be virtually impossible to fully map or diagnose them."[19] On the one hand, drawing on the convention of melodrama, Al transposes "broad conflicts onto the particular scenarios it emplots, making a particular scene stand in for and replace a larger conflict."[20] On the other hand, Carver implicitly criticizes Al's melodramatic sentiment as such by turning the pet—the allegedly most innocent creature in the neoliberal therapeutic culture—into the truly vulnerable who cannot articulate her pain and suffering.

"Jerry and Molly and Sam" displays a white middle-class father's orgies of feeling through his tension between domesticity and anarchy. For Al, Suzy is an undomesticated animal that illegitimately invades into his home and messes his life up:

> "She doesn't have good sense!" was how Al put it. She was a sneak, besides. The moment the back door was left open and everyone gone, she'd pry open the screen, come through to the living room, and urinate on the carpet. There were at least a half dozen map-shaped stains on it right now. But her favorite place was the utility room, where she could root in the dirty clothes, so that all of the shorts and panties now had crotch or seat chewed away.

[17] Ibid, 150.
[18] Ibid, 162.
[19] Ibid, 168.
[20] Ibid, 16.

> And she chewed through the antenna wires on the outside of the house, and once Al pulled into the drive and found her lying in the front yard with one of his Florsheims in her mouth.[21]

Al tries to segregate Suzy from their house, but she invades their private territory; Suzy does not know how to govern herself. What is worse, Suzy does not have a sense of private property; Susan undermines Al's masculine pride by damaging "all of the shorts and panties," symbolically showing that his family's sexuality is out of his control. Also, as if to ridicule Al's lack of social mobility, Suzy keeps his shoe in her mouth. In short, Suzy questions Al's masculine privilege; having a non-doglike woman's/girl's name, Suzy's invasion of Al's privacy humiliates and emasculates him.

To borrow from Amy Kaplan, Al's home is represented as a "distended body that could be hacked apart, that could implode internally from its ingestion of foreign bodies."[22] Al believes that Suzy's anarchy is undermining his middle-class domesticity. However, unlike the heroines of nineteenth century sentimental novels whose moral virtue, according to Kaplan, plays the central role in domesticating the foreign, Al does not have any interest in governing and domesticating the wild dog.[23] If "[domesticity] . . . refers not to a static condition, but to a process of domestication, which entails conquering and taming the wild, the natural, and the alien," the story suggests the failure of such a process or the lack thereof.[24] In other words, unlike Ted, Daniel, Spenser and Larch, Al is uncomfortable with the domestic role traditionally assigned to mothers.

---

[21] Carver, *Collected Stories*, 118.
[22] Amy Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2002), 8.
[23] Ibid, 23-50.
[24] Ibid, 25.

Al's antagonistic relationship with Suzy works as a sign of his equivocal internalization of neoliberal governmentality. On the one hand, Al's desire to dispose of the dog speaks to the emerging norm of neoliberal governmentality which promotes the incarceration of racial, sexual and class others rather than wasting time and money to domesticate them. Al sees no need to domesticate the dog when he feels the threat that his family might "implode internally from its ingestion of [the dog's mongrel body]." In other words, Al's abandoning of the dog works as a symbol of the emerging prison-industrial complex in which noncompetitive individuals—mostly, racial minorities—are simply excluded from the society rather than given a chance to reform. As Fraser discusses, "[if] such prisons epitomize one aspect of postfordism, it is one that no longer works through individual self-governance. Here, rather, we encounter the return of repression, if not the return of the repressed."[25] Al's mongrel body epitomizes how anarchy is brutally policed in the age of neoliberalism.

Seen in this light, "Jerry and Molly and Sam" adds a new insight to Anker's analysis of orgies of feeling in the age of neoliberalism; Anker mostly discusses how orgies of feeling caused by the war on terror obscure neoliberalism's protracted enervation of power in daily lives and reinstate the state's militarized power in the early twentieth-first century. As Anker states, "[the] eradication of injustice in melodramatic political discourse is not about finding consolation in the domestic sphere, as it is in many film and literary melodramas; it is about an aggressive performance of strength in the national political sphere."[26] However, Al's abandoning of the dog

[25] Fraser, "From Discipline to Flexibilization?" 166. See also Angela Davis, *The Meaning of Freedom: And Other Difficult Dialogues* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2008); Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 248-261; Jock Young, *The Exclusive Society: Social Exclusion, Crime and Difference in Late Modernity* (London: Sage Publications, 1999).
[26] Anker, *Orgies of Feeling*, 3.

and the rapid increase of racial incarceration in the late twentieth century suggest that such "an aggressive performance of strength" is also built from within. In short, aggrieved white middle-class men in the age of neoliberalism find consolation both in the domestic and national political spheres; the invisible threat of neoliberalism is transposed to the purported anarchy of (racial, sexual, class and animal) others who could internally explode the national body.

The punitive turn of governance/government in the late twentieth century goes hand in hand with the neoliberal calculation of costs and benefits. Being incapable, noncompetitive, and dependent on others in the marketplace is itself a sin in a neoliberal world which promises austerity; people get what they deserve and deserve what they get. In "Jerry and Molly and Sam," Al's melodramatic resentment against Suzy is inseparable from his undisguised hatred against Sandy, his sister-in-law who gives Suzy to his family and constantly makes him pay unexpected expenses:

> He wished he'd never seen that dog. Or Sandy, either, for that matter. That bitch! She was always turning up with some shit or other that wound up costing him money. . . . The mere thought of all the twenty-five- or fifty-buck checks, and the one just a few months ago for eighty-five to make her car payment—her *car* payment, for God's sake, when he didn't even know if he was going to have a roof over his head—made him want to *kill* the goddamn dog.[27]

In Al's orgies of feeling, Suzy and Sandy are inseparably linked together as the "bitch": while Suzy's anarchy is feminized, Sandy's financial dependence is animalized. Suzy and Sandy are both deeply dependent on Al when he is not even sure if he is "going to have a roof over his head"

[27] Carver, *Collected Stories*, 117.

and has nobody to depend on. Al's obsessive concern about twenty-five- or fifty-buck checks embodies how "neoliberalism transmogrifies every human domain and endeavor, along with humans themselves, according to a specific image of the economic," in Brown's words.[28] In other words, Al is frustrated by Sandy and Suzy because he is secretly afraid of losing his job and being dependent on others.[29] Without placing the blame on the shoulders of the sexual/animal "others" who invade his family, Al cannot retain his self-respect as a white middle-class father; Sandy and Suzy entrench the image of feminized dependency which veils his own precariousness.

On the other hand, Al's choice of neglecting a powerless pet also suggests his failure of internalizing neoliberal governmentality. If, as Brown argues, "*homo oeconomicus* as human capital is concerned with enhancing its portfolio value in all domains of its life, an activity undertaken through practices of self-investment and attractive investors," Al is an antithesis of such a neoliberal subjectivity.[30] Unlike Spenser who constantly cares about enhancing his own and his surrogate son's human capital, Al, quite typical of the protagonists in Carver's stories, has no idea how to do so; he cannot control his raw emotion and does not have any specific vision about his future.[31] His obsession that he has to get rid of the dog works as a sign of not only his lack of interest in enhancing his portfolio value but his failure to turn the pet into the human capital. By focusing on Al's unique anger and resentment against the animal other, the story illustrates the flip side of the therapeutic middle-class culture in which "rising connectivities between pet animals . . . and humans are happening in the context of eroding human-human

---

[28] Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (New York: Zone Books, 2015), 10.
[29] Barbara Ehrenreich discusses how the invented poor works as a mirror for the middle class. See Ehrenreich, *Fear of Falling*.
[30] Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 33-34.
[31] For example, in Carver's story "Preservation," the nameless protagonist, who is laid off at the beginning of the story, keeps lying on the couch every day. He has no interest in enhancing his "portfolio value."

connectivities," in Nast's words.[32] Al misunderstands the value of therapeutic self-fulfillment, and his sense of anxiety and insecurity in a neoliberal world is increased by the pet.

Homo oeconomicus, in its definition, needs animal others.[33] As Brown argues, homo oeconomicus is marked by its difference from homo politicus; however, its difference from animals is equally important in exploring the cultural significance of neoliberalism. Neoliberalism redefines the borderline between humans and animals: animals do not know how to invest in and govern themselves, while human beings who are not willing to invest in and govern themselves are dehumanized and considered animalistic. In other words, in such a society, animals are turned into a tool for human's self-investment. Animals are considered useful as long as they become capital for human beings. In "Jerry and Molly and Sam," Al is not homo oeconomicus because he does not find any therapeutic value in Suzy. As Nast discusses, in the late twentieth century middle-class society "profiteering from (post-industrial) alienations has been married to pet-mediated modalities of domination, affection, love, family, community, and sociality"; nevertheless, Al has no interest in the immeasurable value of the pet as a psychological anchor in the unstable world.[34] Al's antagonistic relationship with Suzy works as a dubious indicator of his middle-class status.

In *Pets in America,* Catherine C. Grier discusses that in the late nineteenth century the kindness to animals in general and pets in particular became the cultural marker of the middle-class domesticity. According to Grier, this discourse remains dominant throughout the twentieth

---

[32] Nast, "Loving...Whatever: Alienation, Neoliberalism and Pet-Love in the Twenty-First Century," 320. For the development of therapeutic culture in the late twentieth century, see Frank Furedi, *Therapy Culture: Cultivating Vulnerability in an Uncertain Age* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

[33] Brown discusses "*homo oeconomicus*'s constitutive outside" by highlighting the element of "oeconomicus" and contrasting it with homo politicus. Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 80-87.

[34] Nast, "Loving...Whatever: Alienation, Neoliberalism and Pet-Love in the Twenty-First Century," 306.

century.[35] Within this dominant cultural discourse cruelty to animals is linked with one's inward moral collapse, and those who are not gentle to animals are considered underclass.[36] Al has to care about how to make ends meet on 50 bucks, and he cannot think about the therapeutic value of the pet in the larger span. Al cannot think about enhancing his human capital because on the verge of falling from the middle-class, he does not have such a choice.

Al's antagonistic relationship with Suzy, which is equated with his lack of middle-class domesticity, also works as a sign of his lack of love for his children. As Donna Haraway critically states, in the contemporary Western society pets are often infantilized and turned into substitutes for children.[37] This tendency stems from the excessive admiration of the infantilized subject in the late twentieth century; as Lauren Berlant discusses, the melodramatic ideology of infantile citizenship entrenches the image of the beset innocent, which is best embodied by the neglected child and the fetus.[38] In this ideological trope, Al's abandoning of the dog is understood as his vicarious assault on infantile citizenship; like the child and the fetus, the pet is one of the most innocent subjects because of its powerlessness and dependency on pet owners. Being selective about the pet evokes the sinister image of choosing (to have or not to have) children and relinquishing parental responsibility.

Furthermore, Al's challenge to infantile citizenship works as a symbol of the allegedly most serious threat to the American society in the late twentieth century: fatherlessness.[39] When his

---

[35] Catherine C. Grier, *Pets in America: A History.* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina UP, 2006).
[36] Ibid, 130.
[37] Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifest: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003), 33.
[38] Lauren Berlant, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essay on Sex and Citizenship* (Durham: Duke UP, 1997); see also Lauren Berlant, "The Subject of True Feeling," eds. Austin Sarat and Thomas R. Kearns, *Cultural Pluralism, Identity Politics, and the Law* (Ann Arbor: UP of Michigan, 1999), 49-84.
[39] For the critical analysis of American obsession about fatherlessness in the late twentieth century, see Judith Stacey, "Dada-ism in the 1990s: Getting Past Baby Talk about Fatherlessness,"

family finds that Suzy is gone, Betty furiously reproaches him: "You don't love [your kids], anyway! You never have. It isn't the dog I'm worried about. It's us! It's us! I know you don't love me any more—goddamn you!—but you don't even love the kids!"[40] In this story, the absence of the dog works as a sign of Al's disqualification for a nurturing father. For Betty, it's not about the dog; it's not about herself either—it's about the kids. Similarly, Al sees Suzy as a metaphor of his (lack of) fatherhood. Regretting getting rid of the dog, Al reproaches himself when he finds how his family is upset to find the dog is gone: "He felt he was finished if he didn't find the dog. A man who would get rid of a little dog wasn't worth a damn. That kind of man would do anything, would stop at nothing."[41] Al suggests that there are worse things than abandoning the dog: considering Betty's anxiety about their kids, readers most possibly think that abandoning or neglecting the children might be one of the worse things Al suggests. Here, Al's feelings for Suzy is turned upside down—he now sees the absence of the dog as the source of his trouble—but he still sees the animal as "screens onto which all sorts of human needs, desires, and investments can be and are being projected."[42]

In this way, ignoring the dog's agency, Al turns Suzy into a melodramatic metaphor which reflects his predicament in the flexible society. For Al, Suzy works as a metaphor of others who cannot govern themselves and thus should be incarcerated; for Betty, in contrast, Suzy evokes the image of a neglected child. As Peter Brooks argues, "to the melodramatic imagination, significant

---

ed. Cynthia R. Daniels, *Lost Fathers: The Politics of Fatherlessness in America* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 51-79.

[40] Carver, *Collected Stories*, 125.

[41] Ibid, 126.

[42] Nast, "Loving...Whatever: Alienation, Neoliberalism and Pet-Love in the Twenty-First Century," 304.

things and gestures are necessarily metaphoric in nature because they must refer to and speak of something else."[43] Before Al abandons Suzy, she worked as a metaphor of the disorder in Al's public and private life; after Al's abandoning her, she is turned into a metaphor of innocence on which Al's middle-class fatherhood hinges. As animal studies scholar Erica Fudge puts it, "human ontological security . . . needs animals to exist. . . . It is through thinking about the function of pets that we might get a clearer sense of who this being called the human is in the industrialized West."[44] Al now believes that the return of Suzy would solve all of his problems, just like his previous belief that the expulsion of Suzy from their home would solve everything: "'Is there still a chance for me?' Al said. He felt tears spring to his eyes. He was amazed. He couldn't help but grin at himself and shake his head as he got out his handkerchief."[45] Carver critically shows Al's melodramatic moral conversion suffused with tears; in this scene, the sacrifice of Suzy is redemptive and tears are turned into the therapeutic source of power. Al sentimentally projects his bright future onto Suzy, ignoring her own existence; in short, his view is as melodramatic and anthropocentric as before.

The ending of the story ironically reveals the limit of such anthropocentric melodrama. The story ends at the very moment Al finds the "significant other."[46] In "Jerry and Molly and Sam," the dog's indifference revises the convention of melodrama that "the recognition of virtue is the endpoint of the narrative, and the climax of the story demonstrates the protagonist's moral goodness."[47] Al does not get rewarded for his melodramatic makeover. Regretting his choice of

---

[43] Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1976), 10.
[44] Erica Fudge, *Pets* (Stocksfield: Acumen Publishing, 2008), 32.
[45] Carver, *Collected Stories*, 127.
[46] Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifest*, 7.
[47] Anker, *Orgies of Feeling*, 8.

abandoning the dog, Al goes out to find Suzy. When Al finally finds Suzy, she refuses to come with him:

> The dog stopped when she saw him. She raised her head. He sat down on his heels, reached out his arm, waiting. They looked at each other. She moved her tail in greeting. She lay down with her head between her front legs and regarded him. He waited. She got up. She went around the fence and out of sight. He sat there. He thought he didn't feel so bad, all things considered. The world was full of dogs. There were dogs and there were dogs. Some dogs you just couldn't do anything with.[48]

It is unclear if Suzy leaves him because she hates him; she shows no sense of fear, does not retaliate, and looks like she's simply indifferent. In any case, Al eventually recognizes that "some dogs you just couldn't do anything with,"; Suzy's indifference and her detached emotion are a mirror image of Al's anthropocentric and melodramatic desire to turn his pet into a metaphor. In this sense, then, this is not a story about abandoning a dog; it is, rather, that of being abandoned by a dog. Al tries to recuperate his masculine identity by denigrating a dog, but the dog's otherness reinforces Al's sense of confusion and instability in the "risk society"; for not only Suzy but Al, home is forever lost.

Revising Melodrama: *Lassie Come-Home* and "Jerry and Molly and Sam"

"Jerry and Molly and Sam" further questions and complicates the relationship between a white middle-class father and the animal other in the age of neoliberalism by making a clear-cut contrast with *Lassie Come-Home*, "probably the most popular in a whole series of dog books in the twentieth century."[49] Al blames his insecurity on his dog while in *Lassie Come-Home* a dog

[48] Ibid, 127-128.
[49] Henry Jenkins, "'Her Suffering Aristocratic Majesty': The Sentimental Value of *Lassie.*" Ed.

produces a sense of security in the age of the Great Depression. This contrast is no accident because Al remembers "reading stories about lost dogs finding their way hundreds of miles back home again" while he tries to find a place to get rid of Suzy.[50] Written by Eric Knight in 1940, *Lassie Come-Home* is a melodramatic story about Lassie, a Rough Collie that miraculously travels hundreds of miles to reunite with her original family in Yorkshire. Losing his job at the coal mine, Mr. Carraclough unwillingly sells Lassie to the Duke to make ends meet. To his son Joe Carraclough, it seems that her absence has changed his home: "When they had had Lassie, the home had been comfortable and warm and fine and friendly. Now that she was gone nothing went right. So the answer was simple. If Lassie were only back again, then everything once more would be as it used to be."[51] Indeed, Lassie's return makes the Carracloughs happy again, recuperating the sense of home. Lassie's repeated escape from the Duke apparently looks anarchic, but her return to the Carraclough family suggests that she is domesticated under a proper middle-class family. In addition, thanks to his loyal dog, Mr. Carraclough finds a job of taking care of the Duke's dogs; the class tension between the Carracloughs' middle class earned (but precarious) wealth and the Duke's aristocracy is dissolved. In contrast, "Jerry and Molly and Sam" does not provide such a happy ending. *Lassie Come-Home* and "Jerry and Molly and Sam" similarly demonstrate the lack of choice for middle-class men: as Fudge states, "vision of the human as free to choose, independent and coherent is nothing more than a child's fantasy" in these stories.[52] In spite of dehumanization of a white man, however, in *Lassie Come-Home* the loyal dog covers the white middle-class father's lack of (social) mobility and works as a psychological anchor for the

---

Marsha Kinder, *Kid's Media Culture* (Durham: Duke UP, 1999), 70.
[50] Ibid, 120. For the reception and evolution of the Lassie series in the United States, see Jenkins, "'Her Suffering Aristocratic Majesty': The Sentimental Value of *Lassie.*" See also Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 2008).
[51] Eric Knight, *Lassie Come-Home* (New York: Square Fish, 2007), 60.
[52] Fudge, *Pets*, 32.

family members; a middle-class father's economic instability is resolved by psychological stability offered by his dog. While Lassie's return promises the light at the end of the dark times, Suzy's refusal to go home suggests the impossibility of such optimistic future for a white middle-class man in the late twentieth century. While unemployment and family disruption are considered as temporal in the culture of Fordism/New Deal liberalism, white middle-class men are permanently threatened by the economic precarity and the instability of the family under the culture of post-Fordism/neoliberalism.

Lassie Come-Home is a stereotypical melodrama in which the suffering and pain of the innocent protagonists (Joe and Lassie) evoke the pathos of the audience. The Carracloughs treat Lassie as a member of their family, but the dog is forcefully separated from the family because of the depression. Lassie's exile from her home is very hurtful because the story elaborates on the psychological pain of an innocent child as well as physical wounds inflicted on Lassie's immaculate body while she travels home. Sensationally portraying Lassie's breathtaking adventure of coming home, the story enacts the melodramatic convention of "a dialectic of pathos and action—a give and take of 'too late' and 'in the nick of time.'"[53] Readers' tears are cued, for example, when Joe finally finds that Lassie has just covered hundreds of miles to meet him: "He stood, for the coming of the dog was terrible—her walk was a thing that tore at her breath. Her head and her tail were down almost to the pavement. Each footstep forward seemed a separate effort."[54] As such, the story constructs the virtue through the image of the loyal dog that almost masochistically endures wounds inflicted on her body; the frustration and the resentment the

[53] Linda Williams, "Melodrama Revisited," ed. Nick Browne, *Refiguring American Film Genres: History and Theory* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1998), 69.
[54] Knight, *Lassie Come-Home*, 218.

Carracloughs feel in the age of the Great Depression is mapped onto a specific image of (the absence of) the dog, and the loyal dog's last minute rescue works as orgies of feeling which conceal larger anxiety about "poor times" and "the stricken areas"; the melodrama of the loyal dog covers over the economic hardship of a white middle-class father.[55]

Underscoring the loyalty of the female dog, *Lassie Come-Home* highlights the homosocial relationship between the father and the son; Lassie's melodrama reinforces the gendered norm of the nuclear family, while Carver's story shows its absence. *Lassie Come-Home* emphasizes the masculine and melodramatic virtue of endurance when Lassie is sold to the Duke. "Now what can't be helped in this life must be endured, Joe lad," Mr. Carraclough tells his son. "So bide it like a man, and let's never say another word about it as long as we live—especially i' front o' thy mother."[56] The mother is erased in the story while the father teaches the lesson about masculinity, and this gendered virtue of repressing emotion is contrasted with women's open feelings: "Now women, Joe, they're not like men. They have to stay home, women do, and manage as best they can. . . And when things don't go right, well, they have to take it out in talk and give a man hot words."[57] Knight's novel thus naturalizes the melodramatic virtue of enduring the pain as masculine, and the story ends with the reconfirmation of such a virtue. While Joe's mother complains that Joe and his father are solely concerned for Lassie, Joe and his father silently share "new kinship of men that let woman go on scolding"—as in Carver, a woman is a "bitch," even if it is not explicitly mentioned.[58] In "Jerry and Molly and Sam," such homosocial bonds between the father and the son in *Lassie Come-Home* work as the counterpoint of Al's indifference to his

[55] Ibid, 10 and 11.
[56] Ibid, 68.
[57] Ibid, 69.
[58] Ibid, 247.

children. The mother in "Jerry and Molly and Sam" is represented as hysterical, but the story does not distinguish men's patience from women's hysteria: Al is as hysterical as his wife when he says "she's driving me crazy. . . . The sonofabitch, I'm going to kill her one of these days!"[59] Al cannot teach any lesson to his children: the father does not know best in the story.

Al's frustration about Suzy partly stems from his belief in the Lassie myth. Al sees Suzy as an antithesis of Lassie who comes home and brings the sense of security; Al's home is not a domestic place because Suzy is not domesticated. Thus, Al still embraces the melodramatic myth of the come-home dog; only by holding an idealistic image of a loyal and domesticated dog—Al's melodramatic mindset turns the dog into a symbol of innocence—Al can blame Suzy's deviance from it. "Jerry and Molly and Sam" shows the dysfunction of the Lassie myth in the "risk society"; yet, it also demonstrates how the ghost of such melodrama still survives in the late twentieth century. Analyzing contemporary novels (Paul Auster's *Timbuktu* (1999), John Berger's *King: A Secret Story* (1999), and Dan Rhodes' *Timoleon Vieta Come Home* (2003)) which portray the relationship between homeless men and homeless dogs, Fudge argues:

> In an era of mass migration, social mobility, international travel and increasing homelessness, to rely on a pet to explain away the horrors of the world no longer seems possible. . . . these more recent novels reveal the impossibility of getting home in a world of constant movement. So indebted are we to the dog myth, however, that it is this that these novelists choose to use to show us that we are forever lost.[60]

Likewise, Carver uses the cultural memory of *Lassie Come-Home* to underscore the isolation of a white middle-class father in a neoliberal society. Suzy and Al do not have a home which offers a

[59] Carver, *Collected Stories*, 118.
[60] Fudge, *Pets*, 37.

psychological anchor in the age of the risk society; nevertheless, its ghost—a home free from any anxiety, a home with a domesticated dog—does exist in this story as a melancholic nostalgia which eases and arouses Al's frustration at the same time. In this sense, "Jerry and Molly and Sam" is a post-Lassie story; the loyal dog is absent in the story, but its memory still plays a significant part in resuscitating the illusion of security. As such, "Jerry and Molly and Sam" portrays the reality and fantasy of the post-nuclear family through the nostalgic memory about the loyal dog.

In "Jerry and Molly and Sam," Al reconstructs a utopian relationship with a dog in his imagination; in this story the Lassie myth overlaps with Al's nostalgic memory of an Irish setter, Sam. His boyhood memory about Sam, not unlike Lassie, works as a melodramatic point of reference which gives him a sense of security—an exceptional moment for Al who keeps being frustrated throughout the story:

> Not since he was a kid, it seemed to him, had he known what it was to be free from worry and worse. He thought of summers fishing and camping in the Cascades, autumns when he'd hunt pheasants behind Sam, the setter's flashing red coat a beacon through cornfields and alfalfa meadows where the boy that he was and the dog that he had would both run like mad. He wished he could keep driving and driving tonight until he was driving onto the old bricked main street of Toppenish, turning left at the first light, then left again, stopping when he came to where his mother lived, and never, never, for any reason ever, ever leave again.[61]

By repeating the words "never" and "ever," the narrator underlines Al's melodramatic sensibility rather than his rationality. Indeed, as Williams discusses, melodrama goes hand in hand with

[61] Carver, *Collected Stories*, 121.

nostalgic imagination: "Melodrama is by definition the retrieval of an absolute innocence and good in which most thinking people do not put much faith."[62] Al misses the times when he was free from any kind of anxiety. Back then, his leisure time was completely divided from the business world and he did not need to worry about enhancing his portfolio values; not every aspect of life and self were monetized. Sam was Al's beacon, not only while hunting but throughout his boyhood; it is in a stark contrast with his constant anxiety that "he is drifting." Al is thirty-one years old, so his memory about Sam would be mixed up with the collective memory of the 1940s and early 1950s' romanticized American families and its strong economy.[63] The difference between Al's attitude against Sam (and/or Lassie) and Suzy represents the difference between Fordism's stability and post-Fordism's instability; the former is linked with masculine freedom (like fishing and hunting) and brotherhood while the latter is, in Al's mind, inseparably entangled with feminized dependency and emasculation. Al nostalgically dreams of loyal dogs—in spite of their gender difference, Sam and Lassie are overlapped in his imagination—because he has a classic masculine anxiety that feminized others are invading into his private life.

The contrast between Sam and Suzy also sheds light on Al's hidden anxiety against racial others and lower-class people. Al's harsh attitude toward Suzy partly stems from her bloodline; he claims, "[my] dog [Sam] had brains . . . It was an Irish setter!"[64] Al distinguishes those who have "brains" and those who do not have, and relate it with the blood; such a biological marker helps naturalize incarceration of racial/animal others in the neoliberal society. It is noteworthy here that Knight also puts emphasis on the pureness of Lassie in *Lassie Come-Home*: "Lassie had

---

[62] Williams, "Melodrama Revised," 61.
[63] See Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (New York: Basic Books, 1992).
[64] Carver, *Collected Stories*, 119.

something that the others had not. She had blood. She was a purebred dog, and behind her were long generations of the proudest and the best of her kind . . . . Where the mongrel dog will whine and slink away, the purebred will still stand with uncomplaining fearlessness."[65] The Irish Setter is a "purebred" while Suzy is a mutt, the product of uncontrolled reproduction. In *Lassie Come-Home*, as Henry Jenkins discusses, such "fearlessness" of Lassie is linked with Joe's white masculinity: "Joe had in him the blood of men who might think slowly and stick to old ideas and bear trouble patiently—but who do not run away."[66] The "purebred" also becomes a marker of its keeper's class in *Lassie Come-Home*: as Jenkins discusses, "[middle-class] dog owners could claim status through their ownership of pedigreed animals, even if they were locked out of the bloodlines of human aristocracy, while hybrids, half-breds, and mongrels were seen as debased and potentially dangerous, often standing in for the lower classes in popular discourse about dogs."[67] In short, Lassie's "purity" mirrors the norm of white middle-class masculinity that Joe represents. In spite of the difference between Sam (Irish setter) and Lassie (collie), Al's nostalgic memory of Sam as a purebred setter shows his fear of degenerating from the norm of the white middle-class masculinity. Suzy represents what Sam and Lassie are not; she is not a domesticated and self-governed animal, and she needs to be governed and incarcerated by others.

Conclusion

The title of the story "Jerry and Molly and Sam" sounds mysterious because with the story's primary focus on the tension between Al and Suzy, these three characters do not leave a strong impression on the reader; nevertheless, this title suggests Al's melodramatic inclination to

[65] Knight, *Lassie Come-Home*, 131.
[66] Ibid, 226.
[67] Jenkins, "'Her Suffering Aristocratic Majesty': The Sentimental Value of *Lassie,*" 78.

transpose "broad conflicts onto the particular scenarios it emplots [and] making a particular scene stand in for and replace a larger conflict." The title of the story is a subtle reference to three things that Al is obsessively concerned but cannot get: homosocial bonds, heterosexual relationship, and the animal's love. Evoking and revising the convention of melodrama, the story cynically portrays Al's struggle to recuperate his masculine pride. Al abandons Suzy near the neighborhood where he used to live, but it does not change anything. He goes to a bar and tries to make a friendly relationship with a bartender and a girl, Jerry and Molly, but fails. Also, as I have discussed, Sam and Lassie's memory is overlapped and evokes nostalgia; nevertheless, Suzy's indifference at the end of the story unmakes the dog as a psychological anchor in the era of insecurity. A white middle-class fathers' fantasies are unfulfilled in "Jerry and Molly and Sam"; these three names embody Al's escapism and his lack of future prospect, and Carver's choice of the ambiguous title reflects Al's misrecognition of the structural problem and his tendency to identify helpless individuals as the source of his trouble.

The protagonist's failure and the story's lack of melodramatic redemption distinguish "Jerry and Molly and Sam" from other novels and movies I have discussed in this dissertation. In spite of their common focus on white middle-class fathers' plight in the public and private spheres, the dog's agency in "Jerry and Molly and Sam" critiques the white middle-class father's melodramatic moral triumph. In this sense, "Jerry and Molly and Sam" fits into what Anker calls "the melodramas of failure" which "reveal the failure of the freedom that their conventions otherwise seem to promise and interrogate sovereign practices of freedom conventionally idealized as the solution to socially produced experiences of impotence and vulnerability."[68] Tracing the impossibility of heroic redemption, this sub-genre's self-critique of melodrama is

[68] Anker, *Orgies of Feeling*, 228-229.

significant because "[it] does not posit that characters can escape their unfreedoms by individual acts of redemption or success. The problems that beset the characters are too much for them to bear individually, and a single heroic individual cannot fix them."[69] While white middle-class nurturing fathers' melodrama turns the structural problem of corporate capitalism and post-nuclear families into a white middle-class father's heroic but individual juggling of work and family, the protagonist's failure in "Jerry and Molly and Sam" suggests the impossibility of an individual's heroic mastery over the structural problems.

[69] Ibid, 235.

Conclusion

The cultural archetype of the nurturing father discussed in this dissertation is still intertwined with neoliberalism in the early twenty-first century, albeit in slightly different forms. For example, drawing on the neoliberal and melodramatic narrative of self-makeover, *The Pursuit of Happyness* (Muccino, 2006) displays an African American nurturing father's self-investment and self-government in the meritocratic business world of the 1980s' San Francisco while representing the mother as emotionally unstable in juggling work and family. Based on the real-life rags to rich story of an African American entrepreneur Chris Gardner, the movie revises the image of African American men as deadbeat fathers; Chris is an emotionally and financially responsible father who shoulders the burden of childcare alone while investing in himself to become a stockbroker. Given late-twentieth-century American culture's exclusive representation of nurturing fathers as white middle-class, *Pursuit of Happyness*'s attention to the racial aspect of economic hardship African American fathers face demonstrates the cultural diversification of nurturing fatherhood.[1]

Nevertheless, *Pursuit of Happyness* also has a lot of similarities with the novels and movies discussed in this dissertation: stigmatization of the (single) mother, anxiety about fatherlessness, individual meritocracy and childcare as a part of entrepreneurship and enhancing human capital. While the nurturing father's melodramatic pain and suffering are put in a specifically racial context in *Pursuit of Happyness*—the emotional bond between the father and the son is thwarted

[1] Similarly, *I am Sam* (Nelson 2001) and *Any Day Now* (Fine 2012) focus on the intersection between nurturing fatherhood and disability and homosexuality. While the protagonists of both films look more legitimate victims because of their marginalized positions (a person with disability and a homosexual couple), these movies too reinforce the archetype of the nurturing fatherhood discussed in this dissertation: stigmatization of motherhood and its evoking of the fear against the nation state's invasion of familial privacy.

in this movie not by the mother and the law but because of the dire economic situation an African American father experiences—the movie entrenches the image of paternal innocence by underscoring the nurturing father's lone struggle to invest in and govern himself as homo oeconomicus in the absence of the mother. In spite of the movie's foregrounding of racial hardship, *Pursuit of Happyness* endorses Margaret Thatcher's neoliberal motto that "there is no such thing as society"; the movie focuses on the selective financial and familial success an African American father enjoys as an individual rather than systematically solving the challenge African American fathers face. In this sense, *Pursuit of Happyness* shows the illusion of the post-racial society in which an African American man can overcome the racial divide if he works hard enough; Chris can look like a moral father only when he stops relying on his African American friends and abandons his racial community, making over his lifestyle according to the standard of the white middle-class man.[2]

While morality and family are often linked with neoconservative rather than neoliberal politics, the neoliberal melodrama of beset nurturing fatherhood shows the transformed significance of familial morality in the late twentieth century. Morality and innocence in the age of neoliberalism are marked by the father's choice to nurture human capital and become an independent subject in the market economy, while traditionally the American family's morality was predicated on the mother's sentimental and religious power to secure home as the place of comfort, an oasis from the ravages of capitalism. As Melinda Cooper argues, "[although] they are much more prepared than are social conservatives to accommodate changes in the nature and form of relationships within the family, neoliberal economists and legal theorists wish to reestablish the

[2] Donna Peberdy, *Masculinity and Film Performance: Male Angst in Contemporary American Cinema* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 144.

private family as the primary source of economic security and a comprehensive alternative to the welfare state." While the mother's morality traditionally hinged on the imaginary distinction between home and the world, the white middle-class nurturing father's morality rests upon the intertwined relationship between home and the world.[3]

Envisioning the new type of familial morality, the melodrama of the nurturing father is instrumental in underpinning the individualistic norm of care as an antithesis of the welfare state. As Elisabeth Anker argues, "[melodrama's] ability to name and identify a unified agent of oppression for social suffering, and to promise heroic mastery over experiences of constraint, is the very stuff of individualism."[4] The simplified contrast between masculinized individual meritocracy and the feminized big government is most evident in *The Cider House Rules* and *Mrs. Doubtfire*, but this tension is, to some extent, prevalent in every work discussed in this dissertation. Melodrama's role of transposing the structural issues into the individual is indispensable for the discourse of white middle-class nurturing fathers; rather than being changed or eradicated, the structural problems become the necessary challenges for these fathers, through which their heroic masculinity is tested and restored. However, unlike other novels and movies discussed in this dissertation, "Jerry and Molly and Sam," through its emphasis on the agency of animals as an antithesis of homo oeconomicus, critiques melodrama's obscuring of structural problems as such and thus offers a way to trace the source of white middle-class men's plight and precariousness in the age of neoliberalism.

---

[3] Melinda Cooper, *Family Values: Between Neoliberalism and the New Social Conservatism* (New York: Zone Books, 2017), 9. This is not to say that home and the world were completely separated from each other as they often imagined; as Nancy F. Cott explains in her discussion of nineteenth century cult of domesticity, "[domesticity] as a vocation meant . . . that woman's work-role imitated man's while lacking his means of escape." Nancy F. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Women's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven: Duke UP, 1997), 74.
[4] Elisabeth R. Anker, *Orgies of Feeling: Melodrama and the Politics of Freedom* (Durham: Duke UP, 2014), 176.

In contrast to the paternal norm of morality, up until the late twentieth century, the mother's moral power stemmed from being financially dependent. As Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon discuss, before the 1970s there was so-called "good household dependency," which was a group-based status exclusively given to white middle-class housewives.[5] However, in the late twentieth century, "all dependency is suspect, and independence is enjoined upon everyone . . . [because] the worker tends to become the universal social subject: everyone is expected to 'work' and to be 'self-supporting.'"[6] As Spenser's entrepreneurial education of a fifteen-year-old boy suggests, the white middle-class nurturing father's morality pivots around his status as a self-supporting worker; the cultural representation of white middle-class nurturing fathers often goes hand in hand with his acquirement of entrepreneurship. As risk and uncertainty heighten in the late twentieth century and the status of the middle-class gets more slippery for white males, entrepreneurship and familial self-investment become more significant for dispelling the fear of precariousness. The nurturing father domesticates labor through his embrace of entrepreneurship: he tames labor by turning its relationship with capital upside down—capital is presented as if it were controlled by an entrepreneurial subject, not by corporations. At the same time, the nurturing father turns his domesticity into a site where his portfolio value can be enhanced.

The representation of women in melodramas of nurturing fathers varies, but they have a significant commonality: women cannot juggle work and family while men can. In this sense, the representation of career women in *Kramer vs. Kramer* and *Mrs. Doubtfire* is most archetypical: even if single fathers and single mothers are working on the same project of juggling work and

[5] Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon, "A Genealogy of 'Dependency': Tracing a Keyword of the US Welfare State." Nancy Fraser, *Fortunes of Feminism: From State-Managed Capitalism to Neoliberal Crisis* (New York: Verso, 2013), 87-99.
[6] Ibid, 100-101.

family, only single fathers can, oddly, make it. As Amy Kaplan suggests, reading nineteenth century women's domestic fiction "means turning inward to the privileged space of the domestic novel—the interiority of the female subject—to find traces of foreignness that must be domesticated or expunged."[7] In contrast, in the melodrama of the nurturing father, the interiority of the male subject, which is adorned with moral superiority, embodies its privileged space while "foreignness that must be domesticated or expunged" is enacted by undomesticated career women. The nurturing father rescues his children from the crisis of a "distended body that could be hacked apart, that could implode internally from its ingestion of foreign bodies."[8] As Charles Murray's essay "Coming White Underclass" suggests, single motherhood is associated with the African American culture of poverty; the white middle-class nurturing father also saves the nation state from the purported erosion of white racial dominance.

Appropriating the economic and familial precariousness women have historically experienced, white middle-class fathers in these movies excel over women. In other words, the career woman in these movies also mirrors the nurturing father's previous self: she is too concerned with the interest of her business and dismisses the interest of her children, and marked by her lack of emotion and domesticity. Drawing on the melodramatic narrative of personal redemption, the nurturing father overcomes the limit of his previous self, who is simultaneously identified with the caricatured career woman. Reinforcing the old patriarchal idea that the male can include and encompass the female, the melodrama of the nurturing father restores white middle-class men's masculinity.

---

[7] Amy Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2002), 43.
[8] Ibid, 8.

The melodrama of the nurturing father reinforces a racial borderline, too. Implicitly and explicitly evoking the stereotyped image of the African American deadbeat father as its counterpoint, the nurturing father is represented as white middle-class. The source of the difference between white fathers and black fathers is attributed to their familial morality rather than structural problems of racism, and the white middle-class nurturing father works as a cultural icon which conceals the "possessive investment in whiteness": as George Lipsitz argues, "white Americans produce largely cultural explanations for structural social problems . . . [The discourse of possessive investment in whiteness] often attributes the economic advantages enjoyed by whites to their family values, faith, and foresight."[9] If this discourse identifies difficulties black families face—the absence of black fathers—"as the cause rather than the consequence of their impoverishment," the opposite is also true: thanks to melodrama's individualization of the structural problem, white middle-class families' nurturing fatherhood is identified as the cause rather than the consequence of their economic privilege.

Similarly, melodrama's enactment of suffering and pain is instrumental in reinforcing the white middle-class nurturing father's masculinity. "Painful reform" is a stock phrase of neoliberalism, and the white middle-class man's transformation into the nurturing father is represented as "both desirable and painful, or desirable because [it is] painful."[10] Appropriating gender roles traditionally assigned to women—sexual discrimination at work, childcare, and melodramatic emotion—the white middle-class father's self-makeover looks virtuous because he

[9] George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 2006), 18.
[10] Matthew Eagleton-Pierce, *Neoliberalism: The Key Concepts* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 155.

endures the pain and humiliation of being feminized. The risk and thrill of being emasculated—most evident in *Mrs. Doubtfire*—is pivotal in allocating the positive significance to childrearing; without the threat of humiliation, childrearing does not look so dramatically moral.

As the term suggests, neoliberalism aims for a new type of "liberation"; as many critics suggest, under this ideology, creative workers (mostly, white middle-class men) are often seen as innocent victims who suffer from the relics of welfare state liberalism and the old type of Fordist labor.[11] The cultural representation of white middle-class nurturing fathers demonstrate the intersection between melodrama and neoliberalism because, as Anker discusses, "melodrama promises *freedom* for those who are virtuous. . . . The allure of melodramatic political discourse is the promise of emancipation that it offers those who unjustly suffer."[12] Adding an insight to scholarship on neoliberalism's liberation of white middle-class men in the public sphere, my analysis on the melodrama of the nurturing father has shown that neoliberalism liberates white middle-class men in the private sphere too. Suffering from the old norm of the nuclear family and breadwinning fatherhood, the white middle-class nurturing father underlines the significance of reproducing human capital, which cannot be simply measured by the income he earns; the nurturing fatherhood's critique of breadwinning fatherhood mirrors the transformed norm of not only gender roles but production and economy.

Inverting the cultural stereotype that men do not feel, the neoliberal melodrama of the nurturing father represents white middle-class fathers' affection for their children as a new type of emotional investment. Linda Williams discusses the significance of tears in melodrama as

---

[11] For example, see David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (New York: Oxford UP, 2005) and Nancy Fraser, "From Discipline to Flexibilization? Rereading Foucault in the Shadow of Globalization." *Constellations,* 10.2 (2003), 160-171.
[12] Anker, *Orgies of Feeling*, 8.

follows: "Both Moretti and Neale note that tears are a product of powerlessness. It seems to me, however, that because tears are an acknowledgement of hope that desire will be fulfilled, they are also a source of future power; indeed they are almost an investment in that power."[13] In the age of neoliberalism, the nurturing father's morality is marked by his pathetic identification with his children; the father's investment in children is measured by emotional not monetary metrics, thus endorsing Jonna Eagle's argument about melodrama that "what is most significant about melodrama . . . is its ability to produce the terms of morality precisely at the level of feeling, to articulate morality as and though feeling."[14] As a lynchpin of morality and feeling, the nurturing father's investment in childcare is distinguished from the domestic drudgery performed by women, which purportedly saps their emotional virtue.

While the cult of domesticity in the nineteenth century praised white middle-class women's childcare as the marker of her altruistic self-effacement, the melodrama of the nurturing father transforms the significance of childcare as such; for white middle-class men, childcare is a choice and emotional self-investment which enhances his human capital. To borrow from Nikolas Rose, nurturing fathers in American novels and movies embody "active individuals seeking to 'enterprise themselves,' [who] maximize their quality of life through acts of choice."[15] Creating a virtuous cycle between work and family, the nurturing father nullifies the distinction between production and reproduction. Thus, my dissertation slightly modifies Wendy Brown's argument that "neoliberalism's unit of analysis, the generic individual who becomes responsibilized human

---

[13] Linda Williams, "Melodrama Revisited," ed. Nick Browne, *Refiguring American Film Genres: History and Theory* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1998), 71.
[14] Jonna Eagle, *Imperial Affects: Sensational Melodrama and the Attractions of American Cinema* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP), 9.
[15] Nikolas Rose, "Governing 'Advanced' Liberal Democracies," ed. Andrew Barry, Thomas Osborne, and Nikolas Rose, *Foucault and Political Reason: Liberalism, Neoliberalism, and the Rationalities of Government* (Chicago: UP of Chicago, 1996), 57.

capital, is, unsurprisingly, socially male and masculinist within a persistently gendered economic ontology and division of labor."[16] I agree with Brown that "neoliberalism's unit of analysis is socially male and masculinist," but "socially male and masculinist" does not necessarily mean separate from the domestic sphere; the domestic sphere is indispensable for men, too, to enhance their human capital.[17]

As historian Elaine Tyler May points out, the 1950s' popular sit-com *Father Knows Best* did not display the father at work; nor did the audience know the occupation of the Nelsons' father in *Ozzie and Harriet*. As May puts it, "[whatever] indignities and subordination they might suffer at their unseen places of employment, fathers on television exercised authority at home."[18] While the 1950s' family sit-com illuminates the distinct borderline between the public and private sphere, the nurturing father's incessant self-innovation attests to his neoliberal virtue of enhancing his portfolio value through the interaction between his business and family. In the words of Bill Clinton, "it's the economy, stupid"—in the age of neoliberalism, the nurturing father still knows best because, as an entrepreneur, he embraces the individualized ethos of the market economy and brings it back home.

[16] Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (New York: Zone Books, 2015), 107.
[17] Brown suggests this when she states "[this] is so regardless of whether men are 'stay-at-home fathers,' women are single or child free, or families are queer." Nevertheless, her focus on neoliberalism's stigmatization of single mothers misses the cultural significance of single fathers in making of "neoliberalism's unit of analysis." Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 107.
[18] Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 2008), 138.

Bibliography

Alstott, Anne L. “Neoliberalism in U.S. Family Law: Negative Liberty and Laissez-faire Markets in the Minimal State.” *Law and Contemporary Problems* 77.4 (2014), 25-42.

Asimow, Michael and Bergman, Paul. *Reel Justice: The Courtroom Goes to Movies* (Kansas City: Andrews McMeel, 2006).

Atwood, Margaret. *The Handmaid’s Tale* (London: Vintage, 1985).

Averett, Susan L. and Hoffman, Saul D. *Women and the Economy: Family, Work and Pay* (New York: Palgrave, 2016).

Baba, Keiichi and Higashi, Michio. *Spenser’s Cookbook* (*Spenser-no-Ryouri*, Tokyo: Hayakawa Shobou, 1985).

Bailin, Rebecca A. “*Kramer vs. Kramer* vs. Mother-right,” *Off Our Backs* 10.3 (1980), 14-15.

Barnett, Katie. “‘Any Closer and You’d Be Mom’: The Limits of Postfeminist Paternity in the Films of Robin Williams,” eds. Elisabeth Abele and John A. Gronbeck-Tedesco, *Screening Images of American Masculinity in the Age of Postfeminism*, 19-34.

Bauman, Zygmunt. *Work, Consumerism and the New Poor* (Berkshire: Open UP, 2005).

Baym, Nina. “Melodramas of Beset Manhood: How Theories of American Fiction Exclude Women Writers.” *American Quarterly* 33.2 (Summer 1981), 123-139.

Beck, Ulrich. *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*. Trans. Mark Ritter (London: Sage, 1992).

Berlant, Lauren. *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship* (Durham: Duke UP, 1997).

Berlant, Lauren. “The Subject of True Feeling,” eds. Austin Sarat and Thomas R. Kearns, *Cultural Pluralism, Identity Politics, and the Law* (Ann Arbor: UP of Michigan, 1999), 49-84.

Bertens, Hans and D’haen, Theo. *Contemporary American Crime Fiction* (New York: Palgrave, 2001).

Blau, Francine D. and Kahn, Lawrence M. “The U.S. Gender Pay Gap in the 1990s: Slowing Convergence.” *ILR Review* 60.1 (2006), 45-66.

Booth, Alison. “*Neo-Victorian Self-Help*, or Cider House Rules.” *American Literary History* 14.2 (2002), 284-310.

Bordo, Susan. *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* (Berkley: UP of California, 2003).

Bourdieu, Pierre. *Distinction* (New York: Harvard UP, 1984).

———. *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1977).

Boxer, David and Phillips, Cassandra. "Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?: Voyeurism, Dissociation, and the Art of Raymond Carver." *The Iowa Review*, 10.1 (1979), 75-90.

Breu, Christopher. *Hard-Boiled Masculinities* (Minnesota: UP of Minnesota, 2005).

Briggs, Laura. *Somebody's Children: The Politics of Transracial and Transnational Adoption* (Durham: Duke UP, 2012).

Brooks, Peter. *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1976).

Brown, Wendy. *Edgework* (New Jersey: Princeton UP, 2005).

———. *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (New York: Zone Books, 2015).

Bruzzi, Stella. *Bringing up Daddy: Fatherhood and Masculinity in Post-war Hollywood* (London: British Film Institute, 2005).

———. *Undressing Cinema: Clothing and Identity in the Movies* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

Budgeon, Shelly. "The Contradictions of Successful Femininity: Third-Wave Feminism, Postfeminism and 'New' Femininities." *New Femininities: Postfeminism, Neoliberalism and Subjectivity*. Eds. Rosalind Gill and Christina Scharff (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 279-292.

Butler, Judith. *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

Carbone, June and Cahn, Naomi. *Marriage Markets: How Inequality Is Remaking the American Family* (New York: Oxford UP, 2014).

Carver, Raymond. *Collected Stories* (New York: The Library of America, 2009).

Cassuto, Leonard. *Hard-Boiled Sentimentality: The Secret History of American Crime Stories* (New York: Columbia UP, 2009).

Chen, Eva. "Neoliberalism and Popular Women's Culture: Rethinking Choice, Freedom and Agency." *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 16.4 (2013), 440-452.

Chira, Susan. "War Over Role of American Fathers," *New York Times* (June 19, 1994), A22.

Clarke, Graham. “Investing the Glimpse: Raymond Carver and the Syntax of Silence.” Ed. Graham Clarke, *The New American Writing: Essays on American Literature since 1970* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1990), 99-122.

Colby, Paul. *The American Thriller: Generic Innovation and Social Change in the 1970s* (New York: Palgrave, 2000).

Coontz, Stephanie. *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (New York: Basic Books, 1992).

Cooper, Melinda. *Family Values: Between Neoliberalism and the New Social Conservatism* (New York: Zone Books, 2017).

Corkin, Stanley. *Starring New York: Filming the Grime and the Glamour of the Long 1970s* (New York: Oxford UP, 2011).

Cott, Nancy F. *The Bonds of Womanhood: “Women’s Sphere” in New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1997).

Crowley, Jocelyn Elise. *Defiant Dads: Fathers’ Rights Activists in America* (New York: Cornell UP, 2008).

Davis, Angela. *The Meaning of Freedom: And Other Difficult Dialogues* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2008).

Davis, Todd F. and Womack, Kenneth. *The Critical Response to John Irving* (London: Praeger, 2004).

De Benedictis, Sara. “‘Feral’ Parents: Austerity Parenting under Neoliberalism.” *Studies in the Maternal* 4.2 (2012), 1-21.

Denning, Michael. *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Verso, 1997).

Diawara, Manthia. “Noir by Noirs: Towards a New Realism in Black Cinema.” *African American Review* 27.4 (1993), 525-538.

Due, Reidar. *Love in Motion: Erotic Relationships in Film* (New York: Columbia UP, 2013).

Duggan, Lisa. *The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003).

Dullea, Georgia. “Child Custody: Jurists Weigh Film vs. Life,” *The New York Times* (21 December, 1979), B6.

Dyer, Richard. *White* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

Eagle, Jonna. *Imperial Affects: Sensational Melodrama and the Attractions of American Cinema* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP).

———. "Men's Movements." Ed. Bret E. Caroll, *American Masculinities: A Historical Encyclopedia* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publication, 2003), 301-304.

Eagleton-Pierce, Matthew. *Neoliberalism: The Key Concepts* (New York: Routledge, 2016).

Ehrenreich, Barbara and Hochschild, Arlie Russel, eds. *Global Woman: Nannies, Maids, and Sex Workers in the New Economy* (London: Granta Books, 2003).

Ehrenreich, Barbara. *Fear of Falling: The Inner Life of the Middle Class* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1990).

———. *The Hearts of Men: American Dreams and the Flight from Commitment* (New York: Anchor Books, 1983).

Elsaesser, Thomas. "Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama," ed. Christine Gledhill, *Home is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film* (London: British Film Institute, 1987), 43-69.

Faludi, Susan. *Backlash: The Undeclared War against American Women* (New York: Broadway Books, 2006).

Feher, Michel. "Self-appreciation; or, the Aspiration of Human Capital." *Public Culture* 21.1 (2009), 21-41.

Flanagan, Victoria. *Into the Closet: Cross-dressing and the Gendered Body in Children's Literature and Film* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

Florida, Richard. *The Rise of the Creative Class: And How It's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life* (New York: Basic Books, 2002).

Foucault, Michael. *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the College De France 1978-1979* (New York: Picador, 2004).

Fraser, Nancy. *Scales of Justice: Reimagining Political Space in a Globalizing World* (New York: Columbia UP, 2008).

———. "From Discipline to Flexibilization? Rereading Foucault in the Shadow of Globalization." *Constellations,* 10.2 (2003), 160-171.

Freeman, Miriam L. and Valentine, Deborah P. "Through the Eyes of Hollywood: Images of Social Workers in Film." *Social Worker* 49.2 (2004), 151-161.

Friedan, Betty. *The Second Stage: With a New Introduction.* (New York: Harvard UP, 1998).

Fudge, Erica. *Pets* (Stocksfield: Acumen Publishing, 2008).

Furedi, Frank. *Therapy Culture: Cultivating Vulnerability in an Uncertain Age* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

Fusilli, Jim. "Robert B. Parker, An Appreciation." *The Wall Street Journal*, 19 Jan. 2010.

Gehein, David. *Sons of Sam Spade: The Private Eye Novel in the 70s* (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1980).

Gill, Rosalind. "Postfeminist Media Culture: Elements of Sensibility." *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 10.2 (2007), 147-166.

Gledhill, Christine. "The Melodramatic Field: An Investigation," ed. Christine Gledhill, *Home is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film* (London: British Film Institute, 1987), 5-39.

Gordon, Linda and Fraser, Nancy. "A Genealogy of 'Dependency': Tracing a Keyword of the US Welfare State." Nancy Fraser, *Fortunes of Feminism: From State-Managed Capitalism to Neoliberal Crisis* (New York: Verso, 2013), 83-110.

Grier, Catherine C. *Pets in America: A History.* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina UP, 2006).

Griswold, Robert L. *Fatherhood in America: A History* (New York: Basic Books, 1993).

Hall, Vanessa. "'It All Fell in on Him': Masculinities in Raymond Carver's Short Stories and American Culture during the 1970s and 1980s." *Journal of Men's Studies* 17.2 (2009), 173-188.

Hanafusa, Takanori. and Hozumi, Kazuo. *Illustrated Encyclopedia of Spenser Novels* (*Spenser-wo-Miru-Jiten*, Tokyo: Hayakawa Shobou, 1990).

Haraway, Donna. *The Companion Species Manifest: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003).

Harker, Ben. "'To Be There, Inside, and Not Be There': Raymond Carver and Class," *Textual Practice* 21.4 (2007), 715-736.

Harper, Donna W. "Robert B. Parker." Ed. George Parker Anderson, *American Mystery and Detective Writers.* Detroit: Gale, 2005, 321-322.

Harvey, David. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (New York: Oxford UP, 2005).

———. *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, 1989).

Haskell, Molly. “Lights…Camera…Daddy!,” *The Nation* (May 28, 1983), 673-675.

Hochschild, Arlie and Machung, Anne. *The Second Shift: Working Families and the Revolution at Home*. (New York: Penguin, 2012).

Hoganson, Kristin L. *Consumers’ Imperium: The Global Production of American Domesticity, 1865-1920* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina UP, 2007).

Hollows, Joanne. “The Bachelor Dinner: Masculinity, Class and Cooking in *Playboy*, 1953-1961.” *Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 16.2 (2002),143-155.

Irving, John. *The Cider House Rules* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1985).

———. *Trying to Save Piggy Sneed* (London: Black Swan, 2011).

Jenkins, Henry. “‘Her Suffering Aristocratic Majesty’: The Sentimental Value of *Lassie*.” Ed. Marsha Kinder, *Kid’s Media Culture* (Durham: Duke UP, 1999), 69-101.

Joffe, Carole. *Doctors of Conscience: The Struggle to Provide Abortions before and after* Roe vs. Wade (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996).

Jones, Jacqueline. *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work and The Family, From Slavery to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 1985).

Kaplan, Amy. *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2002).

Kaplan, Ann. M*otherhood and Representation: The Mother in Popular Culture and Melodrama* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

Kimmel, Michael. *Angry White Men: American Masculinity at the End of an Era* (New York: Nation Books, 2013).

———. *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (New York: Oxford UP, 2012).

Knight, Eric. *Lassie Come-Home* (New York: Square Fish, 2007).

Konigsberg, Eric. “Paperback Writer.” *The Atlantic Monthly* (July/August 2007), Web, 4 Feb. 2015.

Krimmer, Elisabeth “Nobody Wants to Be a Man Anymore? Cross-dressing in American Movies of the 90s.” eds. Russell West and Frank Lay, *Subverting Masculinity: Hegemonic and Alternative Versions of Masculinity in Contemporary Culture* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2001), 29-53.

Kruse, Harry D. and Meyer, David D. *Family Law in a Nutshell* (St. Paul: West, 2003).

Krutnik, Frank. *In a Lonely Street: Film Noir, Genre, Masculinity* (New York: Routledge, 1991).

Lasch, Christopher. *Haven in a Heartless World: The Family Besieged* (New York: Basic Books, 1977).

Lee, Calinda N. "Father's Rights Movement," ed. Bret Carroll, *American Masculinities: A Historical Encyclopedia* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2003), 166-168.

Lehane, Dennis. "Voice of the City," Ed. Otto Penzler, *In Pursuit of Spenser: Mystery Writers on Robert B. Parker and the Creation of an American Hero*, 27-42.

Lehmann-Haupt, Christopher. "Books of the Times; Definitions One and Two of the Term 'Hard Boiled.'" *The New York Times Book Review,* 20 May, 1993, C19.

Lewis, Tania. *Smart Living: Lifestyle Media and Popular Expertise* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008).

Lipsitz, George. *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 2006).

Lott, Eric. *Love and Theft: Black Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford UP, 1993).

———. "Whiteness of Film Noir." *American Literary History* 9.3 (1997), 542-566.

Lutz, Tom. "Men's Tears and the Roles of Melodrama," ed. Milette Shamir and Jennifer Travis, *Boys Don't Cry?: Rethinking Narratives of Masculinity and Emotion in the U.S.* (New York: Columbia UP, 2002), 185-203.

Lytle-Vieira, Jane E. "Kramer vs. Kramer Revisited: The Social Work Role in Child Custody Cases," *Social Work* (January-February 1987), 5-10.

Marsiglio, William. *Procreative Man* (New York: New York UP, 1998).

Mass, Roslyn. "The Mirror Cracked: The Career Woman in a Trio of Lansing Films," *Film Criticism* 12.2 (Winter 1987/1988), 28-36.

May, Elaine Tyler. *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 2008).

McAdoo, Harriette Pipes. *Black Families* (New York: Sage Publications, 2007).

McCann, Sean. *Gumshoe America: Hard-Boiled Crime Fiction and the Rise and Fall of New Deal Liberalism* (Durham: Duke UP, 2000).

McRobbie, Angela. "Feminism, the Family and the New 'Mediated' Materialism." *New Formations* 80-81 (2013), 119-137.

———. “Notes on ‘What Not To Wear’ and Post-feminism Symbolic Violence.” *Sociological Review* 52 (October 2004), 99-109.

Mercer, John and Shingler, Martin. *Melodrama: Genre, Style, Sensibility* (New York: Columbia UP, 2004).

Miller, Lucy J. “Becoming One of the Girls/Guys: Distancing Transgender Representations in Popular Film Comedies.” Eds. Leland G. Spencer and Jamie C. Capuzza, *Transgender Communication Studies: Histories, Trends, and Trajectories* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2015), 127-142.

Mintz, Steven. *Huck’s Raft: A History of American Childhood* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard UP, 2004).

Mitchell, Lee Clark. “Diversions of Furniture and Signature Styles: Hammett, Chandler, Macdonald.” *Arizona Quarterly* 71.3 (Autumn 2015), 2-26.

Modleski, Tania. “Clint Eastwood and Male Weepies,” *American Literary History* 22.1 (2010), 136-158.

Morrison, Toni. *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and Literary Imagination* (New York: Harvard UP, 1992).

Mulvey, Laura. “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.” *Screen* 16 (1975), 6-18.

Murray, Charles. “Coming White Underclass.” *Wall Street Journal*, October 29, 1993, A14.

Nast, Heidi J. “Loving...Whatever: Alienation, Neoliberalism and Pet-Love in the Twenty-First Century.” *ACME: An International E-journal for Critical Geographies*, 5.2 (2006), 300-327.

Neale, Steve. “Melo Talk: On the Meaning and Use of the Term ‘Melodrama’ in the American Trade Press,” *Velvet Light Trap* 32 (1993), 66-89.

———. “Melodrama and Tears.” *Screen* 27.6 (1986), 7.

Nussbaum, Martha C. *Hiding from Humanity: Disgust, Shame, and the Law* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2004).

Odden, Karen M. “Re-Visioning the ‘Vision from a Fairer World Than His’: Women, Creativity, and Work in *East Lynne* and *Mrs. Doubtfire.”* Eds. Diane Long Hoeveler and Donna Decker Schuster, *Women’s Literary Creativity and the Female Body* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), 121-144.

Osgerby, Bill. “A Pedigree of the Consuming Male: Masculinity, Consumption and the American ‘Leisure Class.’” Ed. Bethan Benwell, *Masculinity and Men’s Lifestyle Magazines*, 57-85.

Panek, Leroy Led. *New Hard-Boiled Writers 1970s-1990s* (Ohio: Bowling Green UP, 2000).

Papke, David Ray. “Peace Between the Sexes: Law and Gender in *Kramer vs. Kramer*,” 30 U.S.F.L. Rev. 1199 (1996), 1199-1208.

Parker, Robert B. *A Catskill Eagle* (New York: Dell, 1985).

———. *Ceremony* (New York: Dell, 1982).

———. *Crimson Joy* (New York: Dell, 1988).

———. *Double Deuce* (New York: Berkley Books, 1992).

———. *Early Autumn* (New York: Dell, 1981).

———. *Looking for Rachel Wallace* (New York: Dell, 1980).

———. *The Promised Land* (New York: Dell, 1976).

———. *The Widening Gyre* (New York: Dell, 1983).

———. “Commentary on *Promised Land*,” *New Black Mask*, 1 (1985), 22.

Parreñas, Rhacel Salazar. *Servants of Globalization: Migration and Domestic Work* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2001).

Peberdy, Donna. *Masculinity and Film Performance: Male Angst in Contemporary American Cinema* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

Pfeil, Fred. *White Guys: Studies in Postmodern Domination and Difference* (New York: Verso, 1995).

Reagan, Leslie J. *When Abortion Was a Crime: Women, Medicine, and Law in the United States, 1867-1973* (Berkeley: UP of California, 1997).

Robinson, Doug. *No Less a Man; Masulinist Art in a Feminist Age* (Ohio: Bowling Green UP, 1994).

Robinson, Sally. *Marked Men: White Masculinity in Crisis* (New York: Columbia UP, 2000).

———. “Men’s Liberation, Men’s Wounds: Emotion, Sexaulity, and the Reconstruction of Masculinity in the 1970s.” eds. Milette Shamir and Jennifer Travis, *Boys Don’t Cry? Rethinking Narratives of Masculinity and Emotion in the U.S.,* 205-229.

Rodowick, David N. “The Domestic Melodrama of the 1950s,” Gledhill, *Home Is Where the Heart Is*, 268-280.

Ronald Reagan Library. “Ronald Reagan’s Announcement for Presidential Candidacy.” 13 Nov. 1979.

Rose, Nikolas. *Governing the Soul: the Shaping of the Private Self* (London: Free Association Books, 1999).

———. “Governing ‘Advanced’ Liberal Democracies,” ed. Andrew Barry, Thomas Osborne, and Nikolas Rose, *Foucault and Political Reason: Liberalism, Neoliberalism, and the Rationalities of Government* (Chicago: UP of Chicago, 1996), 37-64.

Saletan, William. *Bearing Right: How Conservatives Won the Abortion War* (California: UP of California, 2004).

Salih, Sara. “On Judith Butler and Performativity.” Eds. Karen E. Lovaas and Mercilee M. Jenkins, *Sexualities and Communication in Everyday Life: A Reader* (Los Angeles: Sage Publishing, 2006), 55-68.

Savran, David. *Taking It Like A Man: White Masculinity, Masochism, and Contemporary American Culture* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1998).

Seiter, Ellen. “Men, Sex and Money in Recent Family Melodramas,” *Journal of the University Film and Video Association* 35.1 (1983), 17-27.

Self, Robert O. *All in the Family: the Realighment of American Democracy Since the 1960s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012).

Sennett, Richard. *The Corrosion of Character: The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998).

Shamir, Milette and Travis, Jennifer. *Boys Don’t Cry? Rethinking Narratives of Masculinity and Emotion in the U.S* (New York: Columbia UP, 2002).

Sheldon, Rebekah. “Somantic Capitalism: Reproduction, Futurity, and Feminist Science Fiction.” *Ada* 3, 2013.

Shepherd, Andrew I. *Children, Courts, and Custody: Interdisciplinary Models for Divorcing Families* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2004).

Smith, Erin A. *Hard-Boiled: Working-class Readers and Pulp Magazines* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 2000).

Solinger, Rickie. *Beggars and Choosers: How the Politics of Choice Shapes Adoption, Abortion, and Welfare in the United States* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001)

———. *Pregnancy and Power: A Short History of Reproductive Politics in America* (New York: New York UP, 2007).

Stacey, Judith. *Brave New Families: Stories of Domestic Upheaval in Late Twentieth Century America* (New York: Basic Books, 1990).

———. *In the Name of the Family: Rethinking Family Values in the Postmodern Age* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996).

———. "Dada-ism in the 1990s: Getting Past Baby Talk about Fatherlessness." Ed. Cynthia R. Daniels, *Lost Fathers: The Politics of Fatherlessness in America* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 51-83.

Sullivan, Patricia. "Crime Novelist, Spenser Creator Robert B. Parker Dies at 77." *The Washington Post,* 20 Jan. 2010.

Szabo, Michelle. "Foodwork or Foodplay? Men's Domestic Cooking, Privilege and Leisure." *Sociology*, 47.4 (2012), 623-638.

Tasker, Yvonne. *Working Girls: Gender and Sexuality in Popular Cinema* (New York: Routledge, 1998).

The Guardian. "Master Crime Novelist Robert B. Parker Dies." 20, Jan. 2010.

The New York Times Book Review. "Books of the Times; Two Contrasting Murder Mysteries." 4 Jun, 1992, C18.

———. "Crime." 31 Jul, 1988, 25.

———. "From Super Sleuths, Great Meals to Die by." 5 Aug. 1981, C1.

———. "In the Kitchen with: Robert B. Parker; He Said He Had a Pistol; Then He Flashed a Knife." 11 Dec. 1991, C10.

———. "Spenser May Be Tough, But Not His Ideal Menu." 11 Dec. 1991, C10.

Time. "Custody: Kramer vs. Reality in Divorce Cases, as in Society, Rules Are Changing," 115.5 (February 4th, 1980), 77.

Troy, Maria Holmgren, Kella, Elizabeth and Wahlström, Helena. *Making Home: Orphanhood, Kinship, and Cultural Memory in Contemporary American Novels* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014).

Trundle, Sean. "Hope and Anxiety on the Endless Frontier: Scientists, State Policy and the Popular Imagination since 1945." PhD diss., University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, 2013.

Tyler, Imogen. "The Selfish Feminist: Public Images of Women's Liberation," *Australian Feminist Studies* 22.53 (2007), 173-190.

Vials, Chris. "Margaret Atwood's Dystopic Fiction and the Contradictions of Neoliberal Freedom." *Textual Practice* 29.2 (2015), 235-254.

Wager, Jans B. *Dames in the Driver's Seat: Rereading Film Noir* (Austin, UP of Texas, 2005).

Wahlström, Helena. "Reproduction, Politics, and John Irving's *The Cider House Rules*: Women's Rights or 'Fetal Rights'?" *Culture Unbound* 5 (2013), 251-271.

Weber, Brenda R. *Makeover TV: Selfhood, Citizenship, and Celebrity* (Durham: Duke UP, 2009).

Williams, Linda. "Melodrama Revisited," ed. Nick Browne, *Refiguring American Film Genres: History and Theory* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1998), 42-88.

Wilt, Judith. *Abortion, Choice, and Contemporary Fiction: the Armageddon of Maternal Instinct* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1990).

Woal, Linda Kowall and Woal, Michael. "Chaplin and the Comedy of Melodrama," *Journal of Film and Video* 46.3 (Fall 1994), 3-15.

Wood, Robin. *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan* (New York: Columbia UP, 1986).

Woodworth, Amy J. "From Buddy Film to Bromance: Masculinity and Male Melodrama Since 1969" (PhD dissertation, Temple University, 2014).

Young, Jock. *The Exclusive Society: Social Exclusion, Crime and Difference in Late Modernity* (London: Sage Publications, 1999).

Zaretsky, Natasha. *No Direction Home: The American Family and the Fear of National Decline, 1968-1980* (Chapel Hill: UP of North Carolina).